

Benin Gender Assessment and Strategy

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ACRONYMS

ABPF	Beninese Association for Family Health
AIMI	Africa Integrated Malaria Initiative
ALCRER	Association against Racism, Ethnocentrism and Regionalism (local NGO)
APE	Parents' Association
ARI	Acute respiratory infection
ASBC	Community-based service agent (health)
ATI	Appropriate Technology International (now known as Enterprise Works Worldwide)
BASICS	Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival
BHR	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Response
BINGOS	Benin Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations Strengthening Project
CAGE	Community Action for Girls' Education
CARE	Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE International)
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CFA	West African franc (monetary unit)
CLUSA	Cooperative League of the United States of America
COGEC	Commune (future <i>arrondissement</i>) Health Management Committee
COGES	Sub-Prefecture (future commune) Health Management Committee
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSD	Child Survival and Disease
DDPS	Departmental Directorates of Social Protection and Family, MSPFS
DDSP	Departmental Directorate of Public Health, Ministry of Health
DG	Democracy and governance
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DPF	Division for the Promotion of Women, MSPFS
EDDI	Education for Development and Democracy Initiatives
EDUCOM	UNICEF-supported community education project
EHP	Environmental Health Project
FENAPEB	National Federation of Parents' Associations
FNUAP	French acronym for UNFPA
GDP	Gross domestic product
GER	Gross enrollment rate
GESCOM/CESH	Project for Community Involvement in Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IEC	Information, education, communication
IFESH	International Foundation for Education and Self-Help
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMCI	Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses
IR	Intermediate result

IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
KAP	Knowledge, attitudes, practices
MCDI	Medical Care Development International
MPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
MSPFS	Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Solidarity
NCNW	National Council of Negro Women
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PAIR	Project for Institutional Support to the ROBS Network
PATH	Program for Appropriate Technology in Health
PENGOP	Primary Education NGO Project
PETT	Primary Education Teacher Training Project
PL 480	U.S. Government food aid program
PROLIPO	Integrated Anti-Malarial Project, Ouémé
PROSAF	Integrated Promotion of Family Health in the Borgou and Alibori Project
PSI	Population Services International
PVO	Private voluntary organization
R4	Results Review and Resource Request
ROBS	Network of Beninese Health NGOs
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
SO	Strategic objective
SOT	Strategic objective team
SPO	Special objective
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USAID/G/WID	U.S. Agency for International Development/Global Bureau, Office of Women in Development
VITA	Volunteers in Technical Assistance
WFP	World Food Program
WID	Women in Development
WIDTECH	Women in Development Technical Assistance Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document assesses current gender issues in Benin, together with governmental, nongovernmental, and donor-funded activities to address them: It proposes an integrated, cross-cutting strategy to strengthen attention to gender issues in USAID/Benin's development assistance programs.

OVERVIEW OF COUNTRY CONTEXT AND MAJOR GENDER ISSUES IN BENIN

Benin has an ethnically and linguistically diverse population of about 6.1 million people. Since its transition in 1990 from a socialist to a democratic, free-market orientation, it has instituted reforms to decentralize and deconcentrate governance and administration, as well as macroeconomic reforms. These have sustained an economic growth rate of more than 5 percent a year since 1995. Despite these reforms, public administration is still plagued with inefficiency and corruption. Poverty levels remain high, with estimates ranging from about a third to more than half the population near or below the poverty threshold. A still-high population growth rate of 3 percent per year has made it difficult to reduce poverty and has strained limited social infrastructure, causing Benin to rank low on the UNDP Human Development Index, at 155 out of 174 countries (1999).

The burden of poverty weighs heaviest on women, who face the obligation to feed and care for their children, in many cases with little or no economic support from their husbands. This is a particular problem for women whose husbands migrate in search of work, and for women in polygamous households. The income women are able to earn is severely limited by their lack of access to land, technology, and credit. Women are heavily engaged in producing subsistence food crops, while men specialize in commercial crops. It is estimated that the 45 percent of women engaged in trade are mainly in the informal sector. Although a few women traders have prospered, most women are at the lowest levels of the trade sector, and often lack the economic resources, information, and training to increase the profitability of their activities. About 40 percent of the female labor force is classified as unpaid family workers.

Legal and cultural factors limit opportunities for women in Benin. The formal legal system has not yet been harmonized with the Constitution, which provides for equal rights for all citizens. Many discriminatory laws remain in effect with regard to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody and support. The Personal and Family Code developed to address these issues is still pending approval by the National Assembly. Meanwhile, customary law still prevails, denying women the right to own property and widowed and divorced women access to household property—and to their own children—among many other discriminatory provisions. Females also suffer from traditional practices such as genital mutilation, and sending girls away to work for other families (*vidomegon*). Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is also a serious problem, though statistics are lacking.

A key factor limiting opportunities for women is lack of education—only 21 percent of women age 15 or older were classified as literate in 1999. Although the gross primary-school enrollment rate for boys reached 95 percent for 2000, the rate for girls was only 66 percent. Girls also repeat and drop out at higher rates than boys. Male teachers and administrators dominate the education system, and sexist or discriminatory attitudes among teachers often discourage female participation. Sexual harassment of girls by male teachers or students is also a problem.

The high level of female illiteracy and the low status of women are reflected in their health status. Women lack control over health and reproductive decision-making, which affects their and their children's access to health services. Use of contraceptives is very low, at 7.6 percent, and average total fertility is high, with 6.3 live births per woman of reproductive age. Women with no education have more than twice the number of children (7) as those with secondary schooling (3.2). Maternal mortality is estimated at 498 per 100,000 live births. All these national-level indicators are worse in the poor rural areas of the country than in the urban areas.

Female illiteracy and the fact that women are less likely than men to know French are factors limiting their knowledge of and ability to exercise the legal rights granted them under the formal legal system. The subordinate status of women limits their ability to participate in decision-making at any level, including the family and community levels, and to participate in organizations such as Parents' Associations and health committees. Women are also poorly represented in administrative and political structures. They hold only 6 of 83 seats in Parliament and 2 of 21 ministerial positions.

PUBLIC-SECTOR, NON-USAID DONOR-SUPPORTED PROGRAMS AND BENINESE NGOS WORKING ON GENDER ISSUES

The assessment team visited a selected group of governmental and donor-supported projects, and a wide range of Beninese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and women's groups working on gender-related issues. This section summarizes the team's conclusions, which contribute to the following sections on the proposed USAID/Benin strategy.

The Government of Benin has set gender and development priorities, including development of the National Policy for the Promotion of Women and its action plan; promotion of girls' education; and creation of gender-disaggregated databases in relevant development sectors. To support these efforts, it created the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Solidarity (MSPFS) in 1999, which works at both the central and departmental levels to promote and coordinate activities to improve the situation of women and families. However, these initiatives are very new and the institutions responsible for them, both the MSPFS and the sections within other ministries charged with gender-related programs, lack adequate staff, resources, and authority. Implementation of gender-sensitive initiatives depends on line institutions and staff, for which such issues are usually not a high priority. Interministerial collaboration and coordination are made more difficult in a situation in which all are

struggling for scarce resources. Both internal strengthening and external advocacy for such strengthening, and for effective action, are needed.

International development assistance agencies are actively supporting programs to address gender disparities and improve the situation of women. They support programs in all development sectors, some working to strengthen government agencies and programs, including the MSPFS, which has received assistance from both United Nations and bilateral agencies, and others working with local NGO partners. The broad range of activities and approaches donor agencies are supporting creates fertile ground for donor collaboration on gender issues in many areas. Because most such programs are fairly recent, the potential for collaboration is just beginning to be recognized.

Local development-oriented NGOs and NGO networks have proliferated in recent years. The assessment identified 66 NGOs and women's groups and a dozen networks, dealing to some degree with women's issues or gender, working in all development sectors. The largest proportion, 35 percent, work in literacy, education, and skills training for girls and women; 30 percent work on poverty reduction and income generation; 20 percent work on the environment and sustainable development; about 15 percent are involved in health; and 14 percent are in women's rights/civic education. However, most of these NGOs are new and small, with an average of about 50 members. Most lack sufficient training and funding and face institutional-development problems. Many have taken the initiative to create or join networks to help strengthen their organizations and programs, and to exchange information; existing networks are usually organized along sectoral lines. Together, these NGOs and networks constitute an incipient but potentially very powerful resource to promote greater gender-equitable development in Benin.

OVERVIEW OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT FOR USAID/BENIN

The recommendations for the proposed strategic approach are summarized in this section:

- Adopt a cross-cutting approach across all existing and new programs;
- Strengthen the current program to better address and report on gender issues;
- Develop policies, structures, and procedures that favor gender-integrated, synergistic programming;
- Develop local capacity to promote and implement gender-sensitive programs by further developing the capacity of Beninese NGOs, networks, and women's groups to promote and implement gender-sensitive development effectively; and
- Strengthen linkages and coordination with other donors, including joint or complementary technical and financial support for gender equity activities.

Current USAID Programs

The girls' education intermediate result and supporting activities have a specific gender focus in that they are trying to increase opportunities and reduce barriers in areas where gender equity is significantly lacking. A gender focus was not specifically designed into other mission programs, although some (for example, health and microcredit) serve predominantly female clients.

Although there is currently no systematic focus on reducing gender disparities in access to resources and participation in all USAID projects, several efforts are being made to address gender issues. However, the efforts taken so far are limited and fragmented, with little synergistic effect. The exception is NGO-strengthening efforts, which have supported other program sectors.

Very little attention is paid to gender in R4 narrative reporting (limited to the mention of women as clients or targets, the percentage of girls enrolled in school, and loans to poor women). This is inadequate to describe the constraint that gender disparities pose to achieving objectives or to reflect the actions taken to address them. An opportunity to highlight attention to gender in managing for results is being missed.

There are four gender-sensitive indicators (school enrollment, promotion, and repetition, and the percentage of loans given to poor women) reported in the 2001 R4, a significant improvement over the 2000 R4, which had only one. This is still inadequate to show both the extent of the problem and the results of the program as currently implemented. There are relatively few gender-sensitive performance indicators (17 out of a total of 79) for the strategic objectives (SOs) and special objectives (SPOs).

Collaboration among USAID-supported activities is occurring, but is limited by different objectives and priorities among activities, different methodologies, different timeframes of activities, geographic separation, and, perhaps most, a lack of planning or incentives for collaboration in activity designs and implementation contracts or agreements. Given the time pressure to achieve results under which all the activities are working, taking the time to coordinate and collaborate with other activities is usually not a high priority. Opportunities for synergy exist but are not systematically built into the program, except to some extent in the democracy and governance (DG) program, which was designed to support the health and education SOs as well as its own objectives.

Recommendations for SO 1: More children receive, on an equitable basis, a basic education that prepares them for productive roles in society.

- Consider adding gender-disaggregated performance indicators in the performance monitoring plan. More specifically, the following indicators could be useful:

- For intermediate result (IR) 1: Improved key pedagogical systems and inputs for delivery of a quality basic education:

Percentage of female teachers with appropriate qualification and who received training; and

Number of interactions between girls and teachers as a percentage of all students' interactions with teachers, corrected for the presence of girls in the classroom.

- For IR 4: Increased civil and government participation in basic education:

Percentage of trained female members in participating Parents' Association (APEs), or some other indicator of women's participation.

- Consider eliminating Performance Data Table 1 from the R4 and replacing it with Performance Data Table 4, which gives gender-disaggregated gross enrollment data and, hence, a better picture of the inequities in the sector.
- Give special attention in new programming to increasing the number of female teachers, especially in rural areas. Consider helping the government with the development of a female-teacher recruitment and incentive policy. Likewise, female teachers should have the same access to training and opportunities for professional advancement as male teachers.
- Seek collaboration between existing credit programs and girls' education to help increase women's income, financial independence, and power in decision-making regarding their daughters' education.
- Integrate gender as a cross-cutting theme in all aspects of programming, and reinforce linkages between education, health, and democracy and governance programs.
- Ensure that the National Network for the Promotion of Girls' Education and the Ministry of Education's Office for the Promotion of Girls' Education have different roles, to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Require gender-disaggregated data in partners' reports. Such requirements should be included in the design of all new projects.

Recommendations for SO 2: Increase the use of family health services and preventive measures within a supportive policy environment.

- Give increased emphasis to opening up greater opportunities to women to serve on health-related community committees and as community outreach workers by promoting the selection of women by communities, extending efforts to qualify more women

through literacy training, and exploring and advocating feasible modifications in selection criteria to reduce barriers to women.

- Continue and increase, if possible, the use of studies on the social, cultural, and economic determinants of health-service use, including gender-differentiated factors among different ethnic groups, and track and report progress in addressing such issues.
- Conduct a baseline study on men's willingness to support their wives' and children's access to health services. Increase outreach to men and conduct a follow-up study to assess change.
- Seek collaboration with existing credit and labor-saving–technology programs to help reduce women's workloads and permit them time to participate in and afford health services and products.
- Seek broader collaboration with existing literacy training programs for women, to help increase women's access to health information, participation on community committees or as health workers, and economic opportunities and income.
- In the new HIV/AIDS activity, consider including activities that engage married women and adolescent girls.
- In the R4 narrative, mention efforts to increase participation in and use of services by addressing gender barriers, together with any positive results these efforts help achieve.
- Consider adding a performance indicator on client satisfaction with and use of services by gender, to measure changes in both women's and men's satisfaction and use—and perhaps spouses' and children's use also, in the case of men.
- Consider adding a performance indicator on participation by gender on community committees (COGECs), under IR 1.2, or incorporate a dimension on participation by gender in the index for indicator 4 under IR 1.2 (performance index for COGECs).

Recommendations for SPO: Improve governance and strengthen democracy.

- Continue support for the development of viable microfinance institutions and programs in Benin, either directly through institutional support, or indirectly through improving the policy and regulatory environment, if resources permit.
- Strengthen efforts to reach more women in the market-gardening and palm-oil components of the ATI program by promoting outreach to women engaged in agriculture, including cooperatives with a significant number of women members, and by promoting access to credit by both women and men to buy the necessary inputs through collaboration with existing credit programs.

- Consider, within the ATI program, introducing other technologies that might be particularly effective in helping women save time, labor, and money, thereby giving them a greater opportunity to participate in community organizations and increase their access to resources.
- Continue and, if possible, increase support for women's participation in the decentralization process and promote women's candidacies for election as local council members, as well as in politics in general. Support for outreach and motivational efforts directed to women by local NGOs, based on the Platform for Women's Participation in Decision-Making developed by a group of NGOs (G/PiFeD) with support from USAID's Global Women in Politics program, would be helpful. The importance of participation by women should be stressed in the decentralization workshops for opinion leaders now being conducted.
- Ensure that any new special objective or activity related to agriculture offers opportunities to and tracks participation of and benefits to both women and men. The current draft proposal for a new SPO includes two results under which initiatives to improve the situation of women could be included. The proposed new IR 1, improved environment for private and local initiatives, could encompass the following:
 - Under IR 1.1, make agriculture and agro-processing technologies, as well as other labor-saving technologies to free time for productive activities, available and accessible to women, either individually or through cooperatives or other groups; ensure that information about export opportunities reaches female as well as male producers, by selecting appropriate communication channels, media, and languages.
 - Under IR 1.2, efforts to increase local-community access to financial resources could explore ways to expedite land titling for women as well as men (individually or in cooperatives) so that land could be used as collateral for agricultural credit. The possibility of instituting joint titling for couples could also be explored, which would contribute to strengthening women's property rights and help undermine discriminatory customary inheritance practices.
 - Under IR 2, increased participation of civil society and local communities in decision-making, IR 2.1 (indigenous agricultural associations and cooperatives strengthened) offers opportunities to ensure that women's groups and cooperatives are included, and that women are encouraged to join or form such organizations.
 - IR 2.2 (advocacy capacity of NGO networks, women's groups, and associations strengthened) could strengthen advocacy capacity on the issue of land rights and land titles for women and women's groups and/or joint titling for couples, among other issues.

- IR 2.3 (new technologies for information and communication increased) could seek to ensure that women and women’s organizations as well as men have access to such technologies, and that they are used to reach both women and men effectively.
- Strengthen reporting on efforts to address gender disparities in the R4, including the impact (and efforts to increase the impact) of ATI activities on women as well as men; and the impact and importance of microcredit in improving the disadvantaged situation of women, as well as the percentage of loans to women. Outreach to women on political participation and decentralization should be noted, particularly synergies achieved by working with NGOs strengthened through USAID support. Any results, such as election of female local council members, should be noted. Synergies achieved through work on health or education activities with NGOs strengthened through DG programs should also be noted in the R4.
- Consider adding a performance indicator on ATI beneficiaries with regard to number and increased income or savings, by gender, for all components of the program.
- If a new agriculture SPO is adopted, develop gender-sensitive performance indicators relevant to the activities mentioned in the foregoing recommendations.

Cross-cutting Recommendations for Policies, Structures, and Procedures to Support Gender-Integrated Programming

- Develop a mission order to support implementation of the gender strategy.
- Create a cross-sectoral coordination and monitoring structure to ensure gender integration across the entire program. The existing synergy committee could be adapted to undertake responsibility for gender as well.
- Develop guidelines to ensure adequate attention to gender and adherence to the cross-sectoral gender strategy by all new objectives and activities, covering development of strategic plans, new SOs/SPOs and activities, results frameworks and indicators, personnel and budgets, timeframes, procurement and selection criteria, and performance monitoring and reporting.
- Plan for collaboration and synergy. In designing activities, build in incentives and opportunities for collaboration and synergy in implementing the gender strategy (and the program as a whole), and ensure that contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements promote collaboration and synergy. Allow sufficient flexibility in activity timeframes to permit development and implementation of collaborative endeavors.

Recommendations for Sustainable Development of Local Capacity

- Support the development of a sustainable technical support and coordination entity, such as a nonprofit NGO service center, for Beninese NGOs, women's groups, and networks, to strengthen their ability to address gender issues effectively. This could be done either in partnership with USAID or another donor, or independently. If possible, develop this capacity in an existing organization rather than create a new one. This entity would provide technical support, gender and managerial training, organizational-development assistance, communications and information exchange, and fund-raising assistance to local NGOs, community-based organizations, and NGO networks. It should be sustainable after USAID assistance ends, through some combination of membership fees, fees for service, diversification of donor support, and private-sector fund-raising.
- If the creation of such a technical support entity is not possible, encourage and support, to the extent possible, the development of a network of local NGOs working on gender issues across sectors to promote the exchange of information, coordination of efforts, and mutual support, with preference given to expanding and strengthening an existing network, if possible.
- Ensure that USAID-supported programs give preference to working with local NGOs and networks supported under either of the above options in implementing gender-related activities.

Recommendations for Linkages with Other Donors

- Encourage other donors to provide support to the above-mentioned technical support entity for local NGOs or to a network.
- Encourage other donors to make use of these local NGOs in implementing gender-related programs.
- Coordinate with other donors gender-related activities in support of the gender strategy, and seek greater collaboration for developing integrated projects.
- USAID/Benin could propose as a model for donor coordination its efforts to increase coordination and synergy among its own programs, according to the guidelines outlined above.

Recommendations for Additional Technical Assistance to Implement the Gender Strategy

Additional technical assistance is recommended for the following:

- Formation and orientation of the gender and synergy coordinating committee, including determination of the committee's composition, roles, responsibilities, and specific functions.
- Training of gender and synergy committee members and all members of each of the SO/SPO teams in identifying and addressing gender issues and cross-cutting synergies with regard to gender, and in performance monitoring and reporting.
- Development of an implementation plan, with specific assignment of responsibilities and timeframes, for action on the gender strategy.
- Development of a feasibility study and design for the technical support and coordination entity for local NGOs, or other means of enhancing the capacity of local NGOs to work effectively on gender issues.

The first three items should be done first, concurrently. The last item should be done when the mission has determined the level of resources available to carry out such activities.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this assessment is to provide the basis for the development of an integrated, cross-cutting strategy to strengthen attention to gender issues and to enhance the effectiveness and impact of USAID/Benin's development assistance programs.

The scope of work (see Annex A) calls for the analysis of the public sector, nongovernmental and community-based organizations, major donors, and USAID/Benin's program and activities to determine opportunities and constraints with regard to improving gender equity and the situation of women in Benin.

Accordingly, Chapter One of this report briefly reviews the major economic, legal, and sociocultural issues facing women in Benin, together with the problems and gender imbalances in the education, health and family planning, and democracy and governance sectors, which are the focus of USAID/Benin's development assistance. The chapter then presents information on government policies and programs with regard to women and gender issues, based on interviews with persons representing selected ministries and programs. This document also presents information on and an assessment of the capabilities and potential of a broad sample of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work on gender or women's issues. A brief overview of the gender-related programs of selected international technical assistance and donor agencies is also included, in order to assess opportunities for collaboration. Given the limited time allocated, this review is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive.

Chapter Two assesses current USAID programs and activities as to the degree and effectiveness of their efforts to increase gender equity or to improve the situation of women, and recommends actions to improve attention to and monitoring and reporting of gender-related issues. The final section of the chapter makes cross-cutting recommendations for policies, structures, and procedures to promote gender-integrated programming by USAID/Benin; for development of local capacity; for linkages with other donors; and for further technical assistance to implement the strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The gender assessment and plan of action was developed by a team of two international consultants, Patricia Martin (team leader) and Erinna Adotevi-Dia, contracted through USAID/EGAT's WIDTECH project; and one local consultant, Chantal Gnimadi, contracted directly by USAID/Benin. The fieldwork in Benin was carried out September 6–29, 2001.

The information for this assessment and gender strategy was obtained through interviews with the following individuals and groups (see Annex B for a complete list):

- Members of USAID/Benin's strategic objective teams (SOTs) and the Program Office;
- The majority of USAID/Benin's partner organizations;
- Selected government ministries and programs, at the departmental and national levels;
- A wide range of local NGOs and community-based organizations working on gender or women's issues, including organizations that receive or have received USAID support and those that have not; and
- A selected number of international technical assistance and donor agencies that have important gender programs in Benin.

The team undertook a one-week field visit that covered much of the country outside Cotonou, with visits to USAID-supported projects, local NGOs, and departmental government officials. Localities visited include Natitingou, Parakou, Malanville, Kandi, Dassa (Zou), Abomey, and Lokossa (Mono). A separate visit was also made to Porto Novo.

In addition to conducting interviews, the team obtained information from a review of mission and other documents (see Annex C), and from the survey forms completed by the local NGOs included in the assessment, which will be attached to the French report on local NGOs prepared by Chantal Gnimadi.

CHAPTER ONE GENDER ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW OF COUNTRY CONTEXT AND MAJOR GENDER ISSUES IN BENIN

The population of Benin, a West African country bordering Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Togo, was about 6.1 million in 1999, with a density of about 55 people per square kilometer.¹ The population is made up of about 42 ethnic groups, the larger groups being Fon, Adja, Yoruba, and Bariba. French is the official language. Fon and Yoruba are the predominant local languages in the south; there are at least six major languages in the north. About 70 percent of the people adhere to indigenous religions, while about 15 percent are Muslim (mainly in the north), and 15 percent are Christian (mainly in the south).²

Benin is a constitutional democracy that has maintained its commitment to economic liberalization and democratic governance since its 1990 transition from a socialist military regime (1972–1989). Since the 1990–1991 constitutional process that brought about democratic rule and a market-oriented economy, Benin has regularly held presidential and legislative elections. Decentralization of governmental administration as well as devolution of political power from central to local government administration is under way. Previously, local officials had been appointed by the central government; now, local council members will be elected at the newly created commune level (equivalent to the current subprefectures). These elected councils will in turn elect the mayor for each commune. Despite its commitment to democracy and reforms in governance, however, the country's public administration is still plagued with inefficiency, lack of accountability, and transparency.

Current governmental priorities include poverty alleviation and the battle against corruption, which, according to an official inquiry, costs Benin about 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) annually.⁴ The impact of these reforms on reducing poverty has been limited. Per capita income was estimated at US\$380 in 1999.⁵ The percentage of the population living in both relative and extreme poverty was estimated at about 30 percent in the World Bank's 1994 poverty strategy for Benin;⁶ a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimate placed 55 percent of households near or below the poverty threshold.⁷

Macroeconomic reforms have begun to take effect, and Benin has maintained its sustained economic growth, with real GDP growth of 5.2 percent in 2000 against an average of 5.1 percent for the 1995–1999 period. Inflation is still relatively high—3.8 percent in 2001—but is forecast to decline in 2002. The tertiary (services and commerce) sector accounts for 48

¹ World Bank, Benin Data Profile, <http://devdata.worldbank.org>.

² Benin profile, people, from <http://www.photius.com/wfb/wfb1999/benin>.

³ USAID/Benin, Results Review and Resource Request, March 31, 2000.

⁴ The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd., EIU Country Reports, July 3, 2001.

⁵ World Bank, Benin Data Profile, <http://devdata.worldbank.org>.

⁶ World Bank, *Benin: Toward a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, 1994.

⁷ As reported in a USAID/Benin briefing book, September 1997.

percent of GDP and is the main source of growth, concentrated mostly in commerce and transport with Nigeria and Niger. The informal sector accounts for the bulk of this activity, providing the livelihood for the majority of the population, primarily through microenterprise and cross-border trade. The primary (agriculture) sector accounts for 38 percent of GDP. Cotton is the main cash crop; cassava, maize, yams, and rice are also important food crops. The secondary (industry, construction) sector represents 14 percent of GDP.⁸

Benin's population growth rate is declining but is still high, at 2.7 percent per year,¹² adversely affecting economic growth and straining the country's limited social infrastructure. Infant, child, and maternal mortality rates, although falling, are among the highest in West Africa, and illiteracy remains high, especially among women. Benin ranked quite low in illiteracy in 1999, according to the UNDP Human Development Index, at 155 out of 174 countries.

The principal safety nets available to the poor in Benin are the traditional ones: the extended family, the community, and various local associations, including *tontines* (informal savings and credit groups), but their effectiveness is limited. Because people tend to marry in their own social strata, very poor people are likely to have very poor relatives who cannot provide much assistance. Also, modernization has undermined the extended family, as the young move away and adopt a more individualistic lifestyle.¹³ Poverty also tends to be geographically differentiated, with the northern part of the country much poorer than the southern departments around the joint capitals of Cotonou and Porto Novo.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on specific gender issues in the economic, legal, sociocultural, education, health, and democracy areas.

Gender, Poverty, and Economic Issues

The burden of poverty weighs heavily on women. Cultural norms and legal practices assume that male and female household partners collaborate for the well-being of the household. In reality, women in Benin generally have the obligation to feed the family and care for the children, regardless of the contribution of their husbands. Women, on top of being principally responsible for the welfare of their children, often face the additional burden of having to provide domestic and agricultural labor for their husbands.¹⁴ Although recent statistics are lacking, a 1991 study in the Borgou region found that 41 percent of the women were solely responsible for the support of themselves and their children. Male migration usually means that the wife has to fend for herself and her children, although remittances provide some

⁸ The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd., EIU Country Reports, July 3, 2001.

⁹ World Bank, Benin Data Profile, <http://devdata.worldbank.org>.

¹⁰ World Bank, *Benin: Toward a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, 1994.

¹¹ As reported in a USAID/Benin briefing book, September 1997.

¹² World Bank, Benin Data Profile.

¹³ World Bank, *Benin: Toward a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, 1994.

¹⁴ World Bank, *Benin: Toward a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, 1994. The 1991 study is cited as Van den Boogerdt, et al., *Description de la situation actuelle et recommandations pour le programme d'appui PADEC-Kandi*, SNV/University of Amsterdam, July 1991.

financial support. Even men who remain at home may not provide full support of their families, particularly in polygamous households. The general level of impoverishment makes it difficult for all but the richest men to provide adequate financial support to more than one family, and there are strong pressures on men to increase their household labor force (and status) through additional wives and children. As a result, polygamous men tend to support their wives and children in a sequential order, with the newest family replacing the previous one.

In urban and rural areas alike, women spend approximately 20 percent of their time on household and family chores (water- and wood-fetching, cooking, care of children or the elderly).¹⁶ This significantly affects the type of activities they can engage in, including the time they can dedicate to economic activities.

According to the 1996 National Population Policy (*Déclaration de Politique de Population*), 42 percent of women work in agriculture producing food crops, while men specialize in commercial crops.¹⁷ Despite their significant involvement in the agricultural sector, women still have limited access to land, technology, and credit, which significantly limits the productivity of their activities.

Women also typically engage in traditional livelihood-supporting activities, such as soap preparation, food processing, sewing, and weaving, which occupy 8 percent of the female population.¹⁸ Here again, they have limited access to equipment and time-saving technologies that could improve their profits and thus their economic situations.

The 45 percent of women in the trade sector are mainly engaged in informal trade, which they dominate by 90 percent. Women also engage in cross-border trade in both agricultural and manufactured goods. The assessment team met with several women producers and traders of agricultural products (including corn, sorghum, yams, manioc, rice, beans, fish, peanuts and peanut oil, and fruits and vegetables) in Natitingou and Malanville who engage in both domestic and cross-border trade. A recent WIDTECH study on cross-border trade in West Africa notes that a few women traders have prospered from the flourishing trade in milled lumber between southern Nigeria and northern Benin; and, on a more modest scale, women retailers conduct most of the trade in kerosene and gasoline bought in small quantities in Nigeria and sold all along the border in central Benin. In much of central Benin, there exists almost no one adult woman who does not engage in some kind of seasonal retail trade with border markets in Nigeria.¹⁹ However, because many women are found at the lowest levels of the trade sector, they often lack sufficient access to economic resources, information, and managerial and accounting training, which could increase the profitability

¹⁵ World Bank, *Benin: Toward a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, 1994. The 1991 study is cited as Van den Booger, et al., *Description de la situation actuelle et recommandations pour le programme d'appui PADEC-Kandi*, SNV/University of Amsterdam, July 1991.

¹⁶ Avant-Projet de document de projet d'appui à la promotion de la femme, FNUAP, 2000.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Morris and Saul, *Women's Business Links: A Preliminary Assessment of Women Cross-Border Traders in West Africa*, 2000.

of their activities. The women in Malanville who trade with Niger cited as problems a lack of access to credit and harassment by police and customs agents.

Finally, although 43 percent of women ages 15 and over in Benin are categorized as economically active (1997 figures), 40 percent of the female labor force is classified as unpaid family workers.²⁰ WISTAT figures indicate that the female share of employers and own-account workers increased from 41 percent in the 1980s to 47 percent from 1991 to 1997.²¹ International Labour Organization (ILO) figures for 1994 indicate that 64 percent of women and 54 percent of men worked in agriculture, while 4 percent of women and 12 percent of men worked in industry. For services, the figures are 31 percent of women and 34 percent of men.²² As alluded to earlier, a key factor limiting economic opportunity for women is that many women lack access to education or modern training, as indicated by the female literacy rate of 21 percent in 1999.²³

Legal Issues

Although Benin ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of any Form of Discrimination against Women in 1992, the convention's terms are rarely applied, as the national legal framework has not yet been harmonized with the convention. Although the December 11, 1990, Constitution grants all citizens, men and women alike, equality in the political, economic, and social spheres, including equal inheritance and property rights, traditional law ("*Coutumier du Dahomey*"), passed in 1931 and which denies women the right to own property, still prevails. This traditional law is a compilation of the customs of various Beninese ethnic groups, a sort of indigenous family code used by the colonial administration. Although it is legally referred to even today, it has no binding power. Still, it legitimizes and justifies the existence of customs that often discriminate against women, and it guides all aspects of women's daily lives as related to ancestral practices.

Because of their traditionally subordinate status, women in Benin are continuously discriminated against in terms of access to education and economic opportunities. Women are also disadvantaged in areas such as inheritance, child custody, marriage, and divorce. For example, a woman cannot declare a child as a dependent, because she is herself considered her husband's dependent. Another striking example is the fact that a female civil servant cannot have a pension.

Customary laws and cultural traditions in many cases deny widowed and divorced women access to the resources once controlled by their husbands. In cases of divorce, the ex-husband will generally take everything with him, including the children, while the ex-wife's parents must refund the bride price. If the children are very young, they will remain with their mother until they become potentially productive; that is, until they are six or seven years old. Payment of child support is a rare exception, though modern courts (to which only a minority

²⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*.

²¹ UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2000*.

²² Focus International/WIDNET - Statistics - Africa, from <http://www.focusintl.com/statr1a4.htm>.

²³ *Human Development Report in Benin*, UNDP, 1999.

of the population have access) sometimes grant custody and/or family support to the mother. In the case of widows, relatives of the husband (generally his brothers) will claim rights on household property unless the male children are old enough to inherit.²⁴

To mitigate this situation, the Government of Benin, working with women's rights groups, in 1994 initiated the preparation of the Personal and Family Code, which gives women more rights, including control over their health, reproductive rights, and economic decisions. The code has yet to be approved by the National Assembly, but it is expected that once the code is approved, campaigns will disseminate information about the code that will help women achieve equal status as granted by the Constitution.

Sociocultural Issues

Despite Benin's extreme ethnic and linguistic diversity and great heterogeneity in terms of cultural practices as they relate to marriage and reproduction, practices such as early and forced marriage can be found throughout the country. Other practices, such as *lévirat*, or giving a widow to the brother of the deceased, are not uncommon.

Girls are also victims of genital mutilation, which is not illegal in Benin. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) survey conducted in 1999, approximately 50 percent of females in Benin had undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), primarily in the form of excision. FGM is practiced on females ranging from infancy through 30 years of age. There is a strong profit motive in the continued practice of FGM by those who perform the procedure, usually older women. In 1999 the government, in cooperation with NGOs, held workshops aimed at eradicating this practice, and several NGOs are continuing this effort, primarily by providing incentives in the form of small grants to women who renounce the practice and surrender their cutting tools.²⁵

Girls are often sent to work in other families (*vidomegon*). This practice, a voluntary agreement between families, places children (90 to 95 percent are young girls) in the homes of wealthier families to avoid the burden the child represents to the parental family. The child receives living accommodations while income generated from the child's activities is split between the child's parents and the urban family that raises the child. There is considerable (though unquantified) abuse in this practice, and there have been instances of sexual exploitation. In July 1999, the Ministry of Justice launched a nationwide publicity campaign to alert parents to the risks of placing their children in *vidomegon* and to inform families and children of children's rights.²⁶

Informants with whom the team spoke mentioned that violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is a serious issue in Benin, but statistics on the prevalence of such violence are not available. At times, the press reports incidents of abuse of women, but

²⁴ World Bank, *Benin: Toward a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, 1994.

²⁵ Draft of State Department human rights report on Benin, no date, but 1999 or later.

²⁶ Ibid.

judges and police are reluctant to intervene in domestic disputes, considering them a family matter.²⁷

Beninese sociocultural values are strongly pronatalist; hence, women who give birth to many children enjoy great consideration, while sterile women or those with few children are mistreated and ridiculed. Those values lead Beninese women to bear many children, which not only compromises their own health and their quality of child care, but also substantially reduces women's ability to engage in productive activities outside the home, because of time constraints. In addition, having large families to care for influences educational decisions. Often, boys are sent to school while girls stay home to help their mothers and care for their siblings, because their parents cannot afford to send them to school.

Education Issues

Limited progress has been made on gender issues as they relate to the education sector. First, only 21 percent of the female population age 15 or older is literate, as opposed to 48 percent of males.²⁸

In terms of formal education, girls represent only 41 percent of the student population in primary school, 40 percent in secondary school, and 20 percent in college.²⁹ Additionally, although both male and female enrollment has greatly increased over the past decade (by 33 percentage points for boys and 25 points for girls from 1991 to 2000), a large gender gap of nearly 30 percentage points prevails. Hence, if universal primary enrollment is nearly achieved for boys, as shown by the 95 percent male gross primary enrollment rate for 2000, only 66 percent of the eligible female population is enrolled in primary school.³⁰

Gross enrollment rates vary from one department to another and are higher in the departments of Atlantique and Ouémé, where they sometimes exceed 100 percent for boys. These high enrollment rates are a result of the high urban population densities in these two departments. Gross enrollment rates are lower in Atacora and Borgou, which are less accessible and have lower urban population densities. Still, throughout the country, girls' enrollment rates are consistently lower than boys'.³¹

Likewise, girls are at a disadvantage when it comes to performance and retention in primary school. Although there is hardly a gap in terms of repetition (26 percent for girls and 25 percent for boys), only 53 percent of girls, as compared with 57 percent of boys, reach sixth grade (1997 data³²), at both the national and regional levels. In other words, special consideration will have to be given to female performance in school.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ministry of Planning, 2000.

²⁹ Ministry of Education, October 2000.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Education for All Assessment Report*, UNESCO.

³² *Education for All Assessment Report*, UNESCO, www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/benin.

Men continue to represent the overwhelming majority of personnel in the education sector. Hence, although most teachers in kindergarten are women (71 percent), their numbers significantly decrease in primary school, where women represent only 23 percent of teachers. In secondary school, the proportion falls to 14 percent and reaches a low of 9 percent at the tertiary level.³³ In the *Septentrion*,³⁴ there are no female directors in secondary school, except in student residences for young girls.

Some discussions with interviewees revealed that Benin's schools are not adapted to the needs of society and local communities, especially in rural areas. Professional orientation is practically nonexistent in the formal school system and fails to prepare young people for either a range of professions or agricultural life. In rural areas, the academic calendar is often incompatible with the realities of the social context and is not attentive to the farming calendar. For example, initiatives to provide community child care and labor-saving and timesaving technologies in rural areas could help free girls from household chores so they could attend school. Finally, educational facilities and services such as building equipment, pedagogical material, and the availability and training of teachers are often poor and inadequate and compromise the quality of education offered.

Teachers' behavior has an important role to play in girls' success in school. Sexual harassment of girls by teachers or male students exists in school, but in many cases is not talked about or brought to the fore. Because parents fear for their daughters' reputations, they would rather keep them at home than send them to school. Discussions during field visits indicated that this issue is aggravated by the fact that the majority of teachers in both primary and secondary school are male, especially in rural areas, where girls' education is not always perceived as a need. There is a policy against sexual harassment in schools, which stipulates punishment for teachers who abuse female students and impregnate them. According to this policy, teachers who are found guilty of sexually harassing, abusing, or impregnating students must be fired and support the resulting children. This policy, however, is rarely, if ever, applied. Although there is no law forbidding pregnant girls to attend school, they usually drop out because they are ashamed. In addition, the sexist or discriminatory attitudes of teachers often discourage or prevent female participation in school, and also affect the performance and retention of girls in school.

In Benin, informal education (literacy and practical training programs) is separate from the formal education system. Practical training can last two to four years in structured centers, depending on the age and aptitude of the trainee and the focus of the training. In 1999, approximately 7 percent of the working population in Benin was engaged in practical training, which is 30 times the number of students enrolled in formal and technical professional schools.³⁶ In the Government of Benin's 1991 Education Policy, two of its eight educational objectives are (1) the development of informal education to give a larger number of youths access to education; and (2) the development of literacy to increase access among teenagers and adults who did not have the opportunity to gain basic competencies through

³³ Ministry of Education, October 2000.

³⁴ The four northern departments of Alibori, Atacora, Borgou, and Bonga are referred to as the Septentrion.

³⁵ *Education for All Assessment Report*, UNESCO.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

formal schooling. As a result, various programs were developed to give out-of-school and illiterate youths and adults educational opportunities. These efforts were accompanied by a policy to use national languages, especially in literacy programs.

Health and Family Planning Issues

According to information gathered for this assessment, access to health services by women and children in Benin is limited by several factors, including husbands' unwillingness to spend money on health services, which informants report are not a high priority for men, as well as their opposition to family planning; women's lack of decision-making and spending authority to obtain health services for themselves or their children; and far distances to travel to obtain services and medicine, as well as their relatively high cost.

In addition, women report that they do not use health services because of a lack of medicine, a lack or absence of competent personnel, and inadequate welcome and disrespectful treatment by health personnel. Not only must women endure cold treatment and long waits (often without chairs), but they are sometimes obliged by health personnel to clean the health center or pick up trash.³⁷

The high level of female illiteracy and low status of women are reflected in their health status. Because men are reported to be highly resistant to family planning, use of contraceptives is very low, at 7.6 percent.³⁸ Average total fertility is high, with 6.3 live births per woman of reproductive age.³⁹ Women with no education have more than twice the number of children (7) as those with secondary schooling (3.2). Nationally, 46 percent of women of reproductive age express a desire to space or limit births. Maternal mortality is estimated at 498 per 100,000 live births, although rates as high as 900 have been reported in some studies. The infant mortality rate is 94 per 1,000 live births.⁴⁰ The 1996 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) indicated that only 54 percent of women made the recommended four prenatal-care visits. Figures for 1999 indicate that 73 percent of births are attended by a trained person,⁴¹ a considerable improvement over earlier figures reported at around 50 percent (1996), but still leaving a significant number of women without trained care. All these national figures are much lower in the poor rural areas of the country. Lack of qualified personnel to deal with complications and the absence of access to emergency obstetric services contribute to high mortality rates when complications arise.

³⁷ PROSAF, Rapport de L'Etude Qualitative sur la Consultation Prénatale, la Vaccination et la Planification Familiale au sein des Communautés dans les Départements du Borgou et l'Alibori, 2001 (preliminary draft).

³⁸ Ministry of Public Health, DPP/SSDRO/SNIGS, December 1999.

³⁹ Demographic and Health Survey, 1996.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ministry of Public Health, DPP/SSDRO/SNIGS, December 1999.

Democracy and Governance Issues

A problem frequently mentioned by the interviewees is that women lack knowledge of their legal rights, particularly those under the formal legal system. As noted above, there are significant differences between formal and customary law in Benin. Female illiteracy and the fact that women are much less likely to know French than are men, together with a lack of self-esteem and general subordination, are important factors limiting women's access to such knowledge and the ability to exercise their rights.

According to informants, women are not accustomed to participating in decision-making at any level, including the family and community, much less at the political level. Household decisions, particularly those involving spending and use of resources, are the province of the male heads of household, unless women have income or resources of their own. If women have their own incomes, husbands are unlikely to provide any resources for household or family use, expecting the women to pay for all such expenses. Likewise, community leaders and even members of community organizations such as the Parents' Associations (APEs) associated with schools and health committees (COGECs) are often exclusively male, although this is beginning to change, in part due to pressure from donor-supported development assistance programs.

Given this generalized exclusion from decision-making and authority of almost any kind, it is not surprising to see how difficult it is for women—especially poor, rural women—to even conceptualize having power, let alone organize to change their situation and gain empowerment. However, this too is beginning to change, because of the recent proliferation of local NGOs, other organized grassroots groups, public-sector services, and donor-assisted projects, which are trying to bring about change. The large number of women's groups and local NGOs concerned with gender or women's issues identified through this assessment process (see "Beninese NGOs and Women's Groups," below) indicates the increased level of concern with gender issues since the country's 1990–1991 transition to a democratic, free-market orientation. This change has created conditions in which civil society organizations, including women's organizations and those defending women's interests, have begun to take root.

Women are still poorly represented in administrative and political structures. They have only 6 of 83 seats in Parliament and 2 of 21 ministerial positions and represent 28 percent of civil servants. In 1999, the female-participation-in-public-life indicator, or the proportion of women in the National Assembly, was only 6 percent.⁴² The figure is now 7 percent. While still low, this represents progress, since women held only 4 percent of National Assembly seats in 1987.⁴³ With the advent of election of local officials as decentralization proceeds, efforts are under way to encourage women to run for local commune council positions.

⁴² Ministry of Education, October 2000.

⁴³ UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2000* (data tables).

In recognition of the many gender-based constraints outlined above, the next section describes some ongoing efforts to address these problems by a selection of public, NGO, and donor-assisted programs.

ASSESSMENT OF NON-USAID PUBLIC AND NONGOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY AND IMPROVE THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN BENIN

This section gives an overview of relevant public-sector, NGO, and donor-assisted programs in Benin. It is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, and is not intended to be an evaluation of any of the programs, organizations, or institutions mentioned. Rather, it was undertaken to gain, from interviews with as wide a sample of respondents as possible and supplemented by available documentation, a general sense of the institutions, resources, and capabilities available, the constraints they face, and their motivation and ability to contribute to greater gender equity and improvement among women, in order to inform the development of USAID/Benin's gender strategy.

Public-Sector Institutions and Programs

The general objective of the National Strategic Note the government published in January 1997 for the 1997–2000 period was to create favorable conditions to ensure that all communities have access to basic social services. In the specific area of gender and development, the government set the following as priorities: (1) the promotion of girls' education; (2) the elaboration of a gender and development policy; and (3) the creation of a reliable gender-disaggregated database in various development sectors.

National Policy for the Promotion of Women. The National Policy for the Promotion of Women was adopted in 2001, and its Gender Action Plan is in the process of being completed. The policy's three major objectives are to (1) increase women's educational and training opportunities; (2) strengthen women's economic capacity; and (3) improve women's social and legal status. Each ministry has designated a gender focal person or team to contribute to the elaboration and implementation of the plan. The whole activity is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Solidarity (MSPFS), which will also supervise the implementation of gender-related activities laid out in the action plan. However, the efficient coordination of such a large mobilization process for the adoption and implementation of the policy at all levels requires substantial resources, which the MSPFS lacks (see below). According to several interviewees, the ministry faces major institutional and operational constraints.

Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Solidarity. The MSPFS was created through Decree No 99-613 of December 20, 1999, and given a mandate to promote the situation of women in the country. The Division for the Promotion of Women (DPF), at the central level, and the Departmental Directorates of Social Protection and Family (DDPS), at the decentralized level, are responsible for the promotion of women. Among the constraints

faced by those entities are a lack of resources, personnel, and appropriate infrastructure, especially in the DDPS, which substantially affects the planning, coordination, and monitoring of their activities. In addition, the relationships between the MSPFS and other ministries, such as the ministries of health and education, need to be clarified, as there is sometimes a feeling that the former intrudes on the territory of the latter. In other words, insufficient interministerial collaboration is an issue, as is the lack of authority of the MSPFS. It became apparent from the team's interviews, however, that this competition seems more related to the scarcity of resources than to the activities themselves.

Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education in Benin is composed of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MPSE) and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Scientific Research. In 1992, the Ministry of Education launched a reform that sought to restructure the school system, improve the quality of teaching, and provide equal access to education and training toward self-employment. The reform introduced the concept of Fundamental Quality Schools, laying the groundwork for effective teaching in schools and pupil intake. More specifically, it sought to improve equity, quality, and access. In the context of that reform and efforts to achieve education for all, the education sector has benefited since 1990 from increased attention by the government, international donors, and NGOs. Increased resources and assistance have translated into increased primary-school enrollment rates for both boys and girls, even though the gender gap remains.

Office for the Promotion of Girls' Schooling, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. This office was created in 1998 under Education Project III, financed by the African Development Bank. The office, which has been integrated into the MPSE, has since been involved in various types of activities to promote girls' education. These include sensitization campaigns for girls' enrollment and retention in school, and distribution of prizes to best-performing girls in secondary school. These activities are carried out in close collaboration with the Network for Girls' Education (see Chapter Two).

The office is also responsible for the monitoring and supervision of various education projects financed by international donors, such as UNICEF's EDUCOM project launched in 1994. Other responsibilities include the supervision of the gender component of the Education Sector Support Project financed by the World Bank, under which sensitization agents were hired to work in the field. The office's activities, however, revolve mostly around sensitization, and information, education, communication (IEC). Although the office benefits from political support, it lacks the financial resources to carry out its mandate properly and is understaffed, with only two women currently working in the office.

Ministry of Public Health. Although policy decisions have been taken in favor of health reform, translating policy into effective, concrete action remains a huge challenge. Systems to facilitate the management of a decentralized health-care system and to ensure access to and quality of services are proceeding, but many issues are still unresolved. These include the provision of appropriate infrastructure, equipment, and qualified human resources, the latter of which is a particular problem in the northern part of the country, where it is very difficult to retain qualified personnel.

Existing community co-management committees will continue under the reform, with COGECs in the future *arrondissements* (commune subdivisions) and COGESs in the future communes (currently subprefectures), with a new health committee at the zonal level. A USAID-funded study on health zones, co-management, and decentralization⁴⁴ recommends that women's representation in these committees should be ensured and expanded, but it was not possible to confirm whether these recommendations have been acted upon. According to another recent study,⁴⁵ existing COGECs are often dominated by elites, excluding women as well as the poor and members of minority ethnic groups. Some donor-funded initiatives have succeeded in bringing the excluded into co-management. Reportedly, some people have interpreted decentralization legislation as requiring that village health units (the lowest-level subdivision in the reformed system) use existing women's groups as their co-management committees.

This same study, conducted in Borgou/Alibori, also notes that there are few women outreach workers or community-based distributors, reportedly because communities have not nominated women, and because literacy is a requirement in a region where female illiteracy is estimated at 82 percent. Yet, some illiterate men have been selected, indicative of the double standard women face. Although criteria exist for the participation of women and youths in COGECs, they are rarely observed in practice.

Some localities are far removed from the nearest health center. The departmental director indicated that in his department, only 69 percent of the population had a health center within 5 kilometers of their homes. He recognized the need to create new centers to serve such remote areas, but said there were no resources to do so. He also noted problems with the cost of services, which is too high for many women, and with health personnel, indicating that they need to be less passive and make greater contact with people. However, despite decentralization, personnel decisions are not made at the departmental level, but only by the minister, which impedes the ability to improve services at the local level.

Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Women's Unit for Rural Development (*Cellule Femme du Développement Rural*). The Women's Unit was created to assist the ministry in including women in its programs. It falls under the Directorate of Programming, Policy and Strategy and has undertaken or is planning the following activities:

- Development of a policy for promotion of women in agriculture.
- Validation workshop with other ministries on the policy and guide for action.
- Training in gender and development for ministry central staff and field agents.
- Working with ministry teams to identify areas where gender is relevant in their projects and activities, and providing follow-up and monitoring.

⁴⁴ C. Mbengue et al., *Health Zones, Co-Management, and Decentralization in Benin*, September 2000.

⁴⁵ A. Morton and L. Kessou, *Benin PROSAF Project Assessment Report*, June 2001 (draft).

- Conducting gender surveys and studies and promoting the disaggregation of ministry statistics by gender. Studies include those on who makes decisions on what to plant, the use of credit, and women's participation in decision-making at the household level, including decisions on girls' schooling.
- Periodic meetings with the ministry's technical directorates to disseminate information, promote collection of gender-disaggregated data, and develop solutions to problems. Work plans are developed that consider gender and include reporting by gender on who does what.
- Communications through rural radio and the organization of women's listening groups. These groups work with promoters to develop themes for broadcast. A focus area is to promote the participation of women on village committees and to help increase communications and understanding between men and women.
- Celebration in October of Rural Women's Day, to focus the attention of communities on the importance of the role of women.
- Helping women and men recognize and use the resources and capabilities available in the community.
- Helping to obtain resources needed, including working with NGOs that can provide credit and training.
- Advocacy for women in ministerial meetings and elsewhere. The Women's Unit also works to get more women in decision-making positions within the ministry.

The Women's Unit is the focal point within the Ministry of Agriculture for coordination with the MSPFS in implementing the National Policy for the Promotion of Women. Despite the unit's efforts, however, significant problems remain. For one, the policy for the promotion of women in agriculture is not being effectively implemented because of the need to change the attitudes and behavior of staff, who have yet to internalize the concept of gender equity. Collaboration between the Women's Unit and the directorates is difficult in light of this situation. For example, the unit requests that data be disaggregated, but the subsequent analyses done by the directorates fail to take gender into account because it was not required in the terms of reference for the consultants doing the studies. Training and fellowships for ministry staff should take gender equity into account, but in practice most women candidates are eliminated.

When asked what the major issues are that affect women at the beneficiary level, one interviewee indicated that major problems related to gender include serious imbalances in access to education, resources, and decision-making authority between the sexes. The objective of the Women's Unit is to reduce these imbalances through promotion and sensitization by field agents and NGOs. The interviewee noted that in regard to girls' education, for example, once one local civic or religious leader becomes convinced of its importance, others tend to follow.

Beninese NGOs and Women's Groups

This analysis of NGOs and grassroots women's groups is a general overview of the existing organizations and networks engaged in gender-related activities in Benin. It is based on meetings with and a review of survey forms provided by 66 NGOs and a dozen networks spread throughout the country (see Annex B). Of these NGOs or networks, 20 percent already work with a USAID partner.

The NGOs and groups visited work in the sectors of education, health, human rights, democracy and governance, and environment. They are also involved in the promotion of income-generating activities, and credit and saving programs. More specifically, the women's groups, NGOs, and networks visited can be divided as follows:

- Thirty-five percent implement programs to promote girls' education and female literacy through IEC, classroom construction, school material provision, scholarship programs for girls, income-generating activities for women, literacy programs in French and local languages, management training for women's groups, and capacity strengthening for Parents' Associations;
- Thirty percent work on poverty reduction by promoting income-generating programs, trade activities, training programs for women, and greater access to credit through loans and savings programs;
- Twenty percent dedicate their efforts to economic, social, and ecological sustainability by increasing women's participation in urban or rural environmental protection programs;
- Fifteen percent intervene in the health sector with programs in reproductive health, IEC on HIV/AIDS prevention, school health, and nutrition and food security; and
- Fourteen percent work on women's rights issues and increased involvement in decision-making through civic education, campaigns to eliminate female genital mutilation and girls' exploitation, or training of paralegals.

Most NGOs have an average of 50 members, but continuous growth in membership shows the vitality of some of these organizations, which have up to 7,500 members.

Based on discussions with these NGOs, it can generally be said that many of them already have a gender vision and may be able to reach their objectives. Special attention is given to female recruitment and the involvement of women in various activities. However, those NGOs often have insufficient capacity to implement their programs because of inappropriate or absent training and a lack of gender-disaggregated data.

A dozen of the NGOs visited do not have specific programs translating their vision into action, and more than 25 percent of them lack budgets, personnel, expertise, and resources.

Most NGOs work with budgets below 5 million CFA francs and are still unable to hire permanent staff. Many complain that their partners finance their activities only, without worrying about strengthening their capacity.

Although many NGOs have working relationships and occasional partnerships with each other, a formal consultative framework to promote synergies between various interventions is still lacking. Such a framework was expressed by many NGO interviewees as a more efficient way to catalyze energy and resources to achieve the objectives sought.

Programs Supported by Other International Development Institutions

This section reports information from interviews with several bilateral and United Nations agencies working on gender issues in Benin. This brief overview of the activities of a few agencies should not be taken as a survey of everything that such international agencies are doing; it is merely a sample of the types of activities being supported.

Royal Danish Embassy. Denmark provides support for a wide range of gender-related activities, including the following:

- Support to the MSPFS to develop the National Policy for the Promotion of Women.
- Support for an NGO that developed a WID center with information and documentation on gender and development.
- Support for a pilot project with a group of women journalists to create a women's newspaper to promote women's issues, including literacy and girls' education.
- Support to an NGO working to eradicate female genital cutting by providing alternative sources of income to the women who perform it.
- Support for a pilot project with an NGO to fight *vidomegon* (the traditional practice of sending girls away to other families) by developing economic alternatives for families to increase their incomes through, for example, food production and processing. Such support would also go toward training in legal rights to combat this and other harmful traditions, such as forced marriage and dowries.
- Promotion of women's participation in decentralization through support of a network promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and citizen participation.
- Support for agriculture and water projects through NGOs, with an emphasis on increasing women's participation.
- Planned support for developing markets along planned transportation routes to increase women's access to markets.

- Support for an NGO working on AIDS prevention along transportation routes, among sex workers, and in the agricultural sector.

Netherlands Development Organization (SNV). Since 1995, SNV has been integrating gender as a cross-cutting issue in its programming, looking at both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the opportunities available to women and men. SNV partners are selected on the basis of their openness to implementing gender concepts. SNV has an organizational gender strategy applied in its operations throughout the world. SNV-Benin also has developed a gender strategy for the 2001–2003 period. Gender is integrated on three levels:

- SNV as an organization, applying gender equity concepts to its personnel and providing training;
- SNV's programs, ensuring that gender is integrated into planning and implementation; and
- Civil society, through working with partners to promote attention to gender.

Every two to three years, programs are analyzed to assess the degree of gender integration.

Worldwide, SNV supports three principal types of activities:

- Support for local governance and administration;
- Support for regional and local participatory planning; and
- Support for transformation in gender relations, including a focus on men as well as women.

The Benin program, at the institutional level, has provided systematic gender training to all staff and also to its partners. At the program level, it is seeking to make all programs gender-sensitive, including research on gender and poverty to inform the local planning process. At the civil-society level, SNV-Benin is working with local NGOs to strengthen their capacities. It also intends to collaborate with partners to advocate passage of the Personal and Family Code, and is interested in working with other organizations for this purpose. SNV-Benin has also been working with women to promote self-confidence and participation in decision-making, as a means of improving the gender balance and contributing to changing attitudes and behavior toward girls' education and gender equity in general.

Constraints include the lack of resources and training affecting local capacity. The interviewee with whom the team spoke noted that it is important to develop a shared vision among programs and donors on what is meant by gender and gender equity in order to work effectively together.

United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). UNFPA has provided support for the promotion of women in various activities with the Government of Benin, including incorporation in training supported by UNFPA for the Ministry of Public Health, and support for the MSPFS. It also participates in the UN theme group on gender, representing all UN agencies working in Benin, and is trying to get the group to focus on how to implement the National Policy for the Promotion of Women and the Gender Action Plan.

UNFPA's gender-related activities seek to achieve greater balance between women and men, and eliminate disparities. It supports, for example, the elimination of gender stereotyping in school textbooks. It also supports research on gender-related perceptions, attitudes, and behavior.

UNFPA provided a gender consultant to the MSPFS to work on the Gender Action Plan, and provided gender training to the focal points in the various ministries. UNFPA is trying to develop the MSPFS's ability to coordinate activities for improving gender equity and the situation of women among the various government programs. The greatest needs of the MSPFS are adequately trained personnel and equipment, particularly at the departmental and subprefecture (social center) levels. The staff is young and inexperienced, and is trying to do too many things at once. It was also indicated that the MSPFS has begun to undertake direct activities, rather than focusing on coordination of activities by other ministries and other development partners, and is in some danger of losing sight of its proper mission. It is hoped that training for operational staff in implementation of the action plan can help correct this problem, which often occurs when there is little political glory or power to be gained from coordinating the actions of others, so the temptation to undertake direct, concrete projects is strong.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). For a while now, UNDP programs have taken gender issues into consideration and have integrated them in all its sectors (environment, health, governance, and information technology). As a result, it has developed a gender-based human development indicator to determine gender disparities in terms of life expectancy, education, and income levels. In 1999, the gender-based indicator was only 0.429, compared with 0.435 for the human development indicator, indicating gender disparities, albeit small ones, in Benin.⁴⁶

UNDP will finance the Support Project for the Promotion of Women, whose main objective is to reinforce the capacity of the MSPFS. In addition, the project will help the ministry raise the human, financial, and material resources necessary to plan and implement activities to promote the status of the Beninese woman. The goal of the three-year project (2001 to 2003) is to ensure that the National Policy for the Promotion of Women is approved and implemented. More specifically, it is hoped the following five objectives will be attained: (1) the Personal and Family Code will have been adopted by the National Assembly and disseminated throughout the country; (2) the National Policy for the Promotion of Women will have been adopted and disseminated and action plans to promote the condition of women in the country developed; (3) financial resources will have been raised for the

⁴⁶ UNDP, *Rapport sur le Développement Humain au Bénin*, 2000, Imprimerie Tunde, Cotonou, Bénin.

implementation of such activities in all departments for the period 2001 to 2003; (4) the technical and operational capacity of the Division for the Promotion of Women within the MSPFS, as well as of the main NGOs and women's associations intervening in that area, will have been reinforced; and (5) the authority of the MSPFS to coordinate the various approaches and activities of other public entities and NGOs in women and development will have been enhanced. In that context of reinforcing the technical capacity of the MSPFS for development of the National Policy for the Promotion of Women, UNDP has also financed trips for government officials to participate in large international conferences on women.

Other UNDP activities as they relate to gender include a four-year microfinance project to support income-generating activities, especially those initiated by women. The project also provides support to NGOs and associations intervening in the microfinance sector. Another project, launched in 1990 and financed by the ILO, helped women at the grassroots level organize themselves to create savings and loan institutions to support various food-production activities. In addition, they benefited from functional literacy and health and sanitation programs as well as training in management and marketing. At the end of the project, those women's groups were combined into seven networks. Although the project still has to be evaluated, the idea now is to build on the ILO's results and extend activities to other areas. It turns out that women lead most UNDP activities.

UNDP staff interviewees indicated that there is great room for collaboration with other donors because the needs are enormous and no organization can handle everything single-handedly. Moreover, many pilot programs should now be extended. UNDP is currently revising its cooperative agreement with the Government of Benin along the following lines: (1) democracy and governance; (2) poverty reduction; and (3) training technology. Thus, now is the time to determine how UNDP's objectives match those of other organizations and the types of activities that could be done collaboratively.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In the context of its cooperative agreement with the Government of Benin, UNICEF has engaged in various activities to protect and promote children and women in the country, one of them being the promotion of girls' education. Hence, in 1994, UNICEF launched the EDUCOM (*Education Communautaire*) project, which intervenes in the areas of health and education. The first phase of the project ended in 1998, and the second is expected to conclude in 2003. The project intervenes in six subprefectures (three in the north and three in the south).

EDUCOM carries out numerous IEC campaigns to inform communities, teachers, and students of children's rights. The project also focuses on strengthening the capacity of community teachers. The community-teachers' training aspect of the program is particularly important in light of the poor quality of the community-recruited teachers, who are not provided with any preservice training. As part of the project's effort to promote girls' education, teachers have received training on gender issues and on the use of girl-friendly classroom practices. In addition, training centers have been created for girls who have had to drop out of school. Under EDUCOM, parents have been sensitized to the need to send their daughters to school, and mothers have been provided with small credits to carry out income-

generating activities to finance girls' schooling, teacher training, school/latrline construction, or other activities to facilitate girls' access to and retention in school.

Work in the field is carried out by female agents who speak the local languages and serve as links between the project and the communities. Special attention is given to the recruitment of women who can be looked at as role models for girls, a requirement that has proved quite challenging in the north of the country.

General Conclusions about Public-Sector and Donor Programs and Local NGOs

The Government of Benin has set gender and development priorities, including development of the National Policy for the Promotion of Women and its attendant action plan; promotion of girls' education; and creation of gender-disaggregated databases in relevant development sectors. To support these efforts, as noted earlier, it created the MSPFS, which works at both the central and departmental levels to promote and coordinate activities to improve the situation of women and families. However, these initiatives are very new, and the institutions responsible for them, including the MSPFS and the sections within other ministries charged with gender-related programs, are still weak and lack adequate staff, resources, and authority. Implementation of gender-sensitive initiatives depends on line institutions and staff, which are still largely male-dominated and for which such issues are usually not a high priority. Interministerial collaboration and coordination are made more difficult in a situation in which all are struggling for scarce resources. Both internal strengthening and external advocacy are needed to enhance effective action.

International donor and technical assistance agencies are actively supporting programs to address gender disparities and improve the situation of women, judging from the sample of organizations visited. They support programs in all development sectors, some working to strengthen government agencies and programs, including the MSPFS, which has received assistance from both the United Nations and bilateral agencies, and others working with local NGO partners. Because of the broad range of activities and approaches donor agencies are supporting, there appears to be very fertile ground for donor collaboration on gender issues in many areas. Because many programs are fairly recent, the potential for collaboration is just beginning to be recognized.

Local development-oriented NGOs and NGO networks have proliferated in recent years. However, most of these are new and small, with an average of about 50 members each. Most lack sufficient training and funding and face institutional development problems. Many have taken the initiative to create or join networks to help strengthen their organizations and programs, and to exchange information. Together, they constitute an incipient but potentially very powerful resource to promote greater gender-equitable development in Benin.

CHAPTER TWO USAID/BENIN GENDER STRATEGY

ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CURRENT USAID PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY AND IMPROVE THE STATUS OF WOMEN

This chapter examines current USAID-supported activities with respect to attention to gender issues and the situation of women. It assesses the degree to which attention to gender is reflected in performance reporting for these activities, and the degree of synergy and collaboration within the USAID program and its partner organizations and between the USAID program and other programs. Specific recommendations are made under each strategic objective (SO) or special objective (SPO). Recommendations for current USAID-supported activities are meant to support and build on current initiatives or plans, and do not imply that such actions are not now being undertaken. These recommendations are meant to reinforce gender-sensitive initiatives already under way or contemplated, to increase them to the extent possible, as well as to suggest additional actions that could be taken that are feasible within existing activities. It should also be noted that the assessment focuses only on activities visited by the assessment team. These were the most relevant mission-managed activities, as well as some centrally funded or field-support activities.

SO 1: More children should receive, on an equitable basis, a basic education that prepares them for productive roles in society.

National Network for the Promotion of Girls' Education. In 1990, the General Conference on Education (*Etats Generaux de l'Education*), followed by the Educational Framework Policy Document (*Declaration Politique Educative*) approved by the Council of Ministers in January 1991, was the first step toward the education reform of 1992, which declared primary education as a priority. The access and equity action plan, one of the 12 action plans developed, aimed to promote the schooling of all Beninese children regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, or social background. The implementation of this action plan led to the preparation of the Access and Equity Educational Policy (*Document de Politique Educative Accès et Equité*) in 1996. During the validation of this policy, it was realized that the Ministry of Education alone could not carry out such a gigantic task. The need to have a structure involving all sector partners and coordinating all activities in the sector was recognized, leading to the creation of the National Network for the Promotion of Girls' Education in September 1997 by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MPSE), with the financial and technical assistance of USAID and UNICEF. In 1998, the network launched its activities in the 13 subprefectures with the lowest female enrollment rates.

The activities of the network include (1) sensitization campaigns; (2) distribution of prizes to the most outstanding female students in primary school in various regions in Benin; (3) planning and implementation of a social communication training program for the committees in its 13 subprefectures of intervention; (4) planning and execution of "Equity in the

Classroom Training” programs for teachers in its 13 subprefectures; and (5) fund-raising activities. The network builds on existing activities to provide technical support and strengthen capacity. More specifically, it helps communities identify problems related to girls’ education, offer solutions, and prepare and implement action plans aiming to improve girls’ educational opportunities. It is not clear, however, how the mandate of the network differs from that of the *Service de Promotion de la Scolarisation des Filles* of the Ministry of Education, which also conducts similar activities, such as sensitization and IEC campaigns. Moreover, the sustainability of the network remains to be seen, the question being whether it will survive once USAID’s financing ceases. So far, the network has not established links with other international organizations. The results and actual impact of the network also must be determined.

Finally, although the network is a national structure, it does not seem to work at the national level, and its results are not always seen in the field. Many NGOs have reported difficulties getting in touch or working with the network, mainly because it is not decentralized enough and is not present countrywide.

Primary Education NGO Project (PENGOP). Initiated in 1994, PENGOP is an institutional-strengthening program implemented by the American private voluntary organization (PVO) World Education and scheduled to end in 2002. It works with Parents’ Associations (APEs) to reinforce their capacity to oversee school management. PENGOP’s activities were facilitated by the fact that, in most schools, APEs already existed. The challenge became one of getting those associations to function effectively because most of them had not had proper elections and were not taken seriously by the teachers. An important issue the project had to deal with was the fact that teachers wanted to keep financial control of the school and felt that the project was trying to subvert the existing system.

Today, World Education works with 1,200 associations throughout the country, which represents a third of the total number of existing APEs. World Education works through local NGOs to promote institutional development training. More specifically, APEs benefit from training in lobbying, management, priority identification, and microproject development. Although construction is not the objective of the project, it mobilizes parents’ interest to contribute 20 percent of the cost of school construction projects.

Although promoting girls’ education is not part of World Education’s direct mandate, the PVO has engaged in research projects on girls’ education. For example, in Banikoara and Segbana, a study tried to understand the real causes of girls’ lack of schooling before trying to convince the parents to send their daughters to school. This study, carried out through questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews, gave the community the opportunity to come out in public and share experiences and solutions, as interviews and discussions were broadcast on radio. It allowed for the sensitization of the public to the importance of educating girls. As a result, enrollment rates jumped as much as 30 percent in Segbana. In Banikoara, however, little change was observed.

In Mono (Lokossa and Dogbo), World Education works with GAJES to provide credit to mothers willing to keep their daughters in school. Statistics show that girls in this program

had higher retention rates than others. In addition, the two best girls⁴⁷ from each subprefecture visited various companies and met with high school girls.

The program was also successful in increasing women's participation in the Parents' Associations. When activities started in 1995, there were only 2 female members in the APEs in Malanville, for example. Today, there are 40. Despite the fact that women do not have much time, they have become interested in school management activities and have played a great role in promoting their daughters' education. The greatest challenge remains, however, keeping girls in school.

The assessment also found that the National Federation of Parents' Associations (FENAPEB) is a male-dominated organization (35 male members), elected by communities. It was noted that FENAPEB needs to be restructured and to be linked more to the grassroots level than it has been in the past. Moreover, women's participation needs to be encouraged. Another problem lies in the fact that FENAPEB is more a grandparents' than a parents' association, because of the ages of its members. The president's term ends in 2002, and it is hoped that women and local populations will be more involved in the electoral process.

There is some effort to encourage USAID programs to collaborate. They already use the same evaluation system, but more collaboration is needed. World Education currently has a small program with the Integrated Promotion of Family Health in the Borgou and Alibori Project (PROSAF) for students' sensitization to HIV/AIDS in schools. World Education also collaborates with Medical Care Development International (MCDI) and the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH).

Community Participation for Education for All Support Project. This four-year (2001 to 2004) project implemented by the American PVO Care International aims to promote girls' education in two low-girl-enrollment areas in the departments of Borgou, Kalale, and Gogounou. More specifically, the objective of the project is to improve girls' performance and retention in primary school through the following activities: (1) a peer tutoring program for poorly performing girls; (2) teacher training in equity in the classroom, research action, and participatory classroom approaches; (3) community mobilization to reduce sociocultural constraints preventing girls' access to and retention in school; and (4) APE capacity building for active participation in the promotion of girls' education. The teacher training aspect of the program is particularly important because nearly two-thirds of the contract teachers in rural areas have not received any form of training. Although the economic situation of parents was identified as a major impediment to girls' education, income-generating activities are not part of the project. The objective of this project is to strengthen the capacity of the communities so that they can make more effective use of any resources that may come their way.

Project activities will be implemented by two local NGOs. The first is APEM (*Association pour la Promotion de l'Enfance Malheureuse*), which works to protect children and eliminate practices such as infanticide and female genital mutilation. The second NGO, *Equi-filles*, is an organization started by female secondary school teachers that strives to improve girls'

⁴⁷ Most girls in the program went to the *Lycee de Jeunes Filles* in Lokossa.

access to and retention in school. (These two NGOs were selected with the assistance of World Education.) To ensure ownership, the programs and activities for the promotion of girls' schooling will be developed and implemented by the communities with the technical assistance of the project. For example, girls' schooling committees will be created, and it is hoped that a large number of women will be involved in these committees.

The project is early on in its operation and has not yet started to produce results. The two subprefectures in which it works were recently selected with the assistance of the National Network for the Promotion of Girls' Education. The network's local committees will act as relays for the project team. However, the capacity of these committees needs to be improved before they can play their intended roles effectively.

Primary Education Teacher Training Project (PETT). Initiated in 1998 by the American PVO IFESH, PETT aims to improve the quality of primary education in Benin through in-service teacher training. Teachers are trained to move from rote learning to child-centered learning. They also receive training on the use of the new curriculum developed under the CLEF project. PETT does not work directly with teachers but provides training to teacher trainers in the Teacher Training Network, made up of pedagogic unit leaders, school superintendents, and pedagogical advisors. Last year, field agents also benefited from training in equity in the classroom, which led to increased girls' participation in class. This was done in an effort to incorporate gender, even though it was not part of the original project design. The project is particularly important in light of the fact that most teachers in rural areas are assistant teachers (*répétiteurs*), and as such do not have formal training and the appropriate capacity to provide quality education for children.

Special projects were developed under PETT in order to tackle problems such as the lack of communication between actors in the Teacher Training Network, the lack of teacher motivation, and the absence of community involvement in school improvement and management. These projects include (1) the creation of library resource centers in the schools; (2) the creation of an educational journal, the *Bulletin d'Echanges Pédagogiques*, as an information and experience exchange forum; (3) the creation of community education councils for greater community participation in the school improvement process; (4) exchange trips to reward well-performing actors in the network; and (5) the implementation in schools of microprojects to allow students to combine theory with practice in the fields of science, technology, and the arts.

Although Benin is just beginning the process in which people and organizations seek each other out, USAID could play a key role in that process. This is particularly important, because project staff find it difficult to focus on collaboration because their attention is on their project work.

Community Action for Girls' Education (CAGE). CAGE is a program designed to improve girls' education in the departments of Borgou, Alibori, Zou, Mono, Couffo, and Atacora. It is implemented by the American PVO World Learning. The two-year project will lead communities to develop activities whose end result will be increased access to, and retention of girls in, primary school. As such, the project will heavily rely on participatory

approaches to help communities identify the causes of girls' low enrollment in school and assist them in implementing locally feasible solutions to deal with those issues. The project entails two types of interventions: (1) technical assistance, which will provide communities with the help they need to develop and implement their action plans; and (2) financial assistance, through small grants, to help remove economic impediments to girls' schooling.

The project is in its early implementation stage; its approaches and results cannot be assessed yet, as the communities targeted have yet to develop and implement their action plans.

Technical Training for Primary-School Leavers and Dropouts. This program is implemented by a local nongovernmental agency based in Porto Novo, the Songhai Center. The Songhai Center trains young farmers and school dropouts in integrated agrobiological techniques and entrepreneurship. The strength of the center is the rational use of local resources and integrated production techniques.

Approximately 30 students (20 percent are girls) are accepted in the two-year training program. The low enrollment rate for girls is attributed to girls' presumed lack of interest in this field. This assumption contradicts the statistic that 42 percent of Beninese women are engaged in agricultural activities. However, the lack of access to land by women may be a disincentive for girls to participate in the program. The program needs to reexamine whether this is a reason for girls' low participation in the program and, if so, begin dialogues within communities to determine whether the communities would provide their graduates with land.

Pilot programs in job skills training for school leavers and primary-school graduates enable graduates to enter the job market with marketable skills. Because girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys, special programs could be developed for them. For example, requirements should be put on the Songhai program to recruit more girls.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Catholic Relief Services, through its PL 480 Title II food aid programs, intervenes in the microfinance, education, and health and sanitation sectors. CRS also recently started to intervene in schools as part of an effort to promote girls' education.

In order to satisfy the short-term food needs of children attending school, CRS has introduced a canteen program in 25 public primary schools in the Parakou area, with a particular focus on girls. Lunch is distributed to children in school in order to improve their nutrition and learning conditions. Home rations are also distributed to girls attending school, to compensate for the opportunity cost in time and labor incurred by their parents.

By increasing female school attendance, the canteen program is expected to have a long-term impact on human capital development, and on parents' and children's health. Educated girls typically marry at a later age, use birth spacing, and are more likely to apply basic health and sanitation principles than are uneducated girls.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the program, communities contribute food and other commodities. APEs that have received management training manage the food and other resources delivered to the school and are responsible for taking the activities over at the end of the project.

In the context of its school canteen activity, CRS collaborates with other USAID partners, such as MCDI (health program in school), IFESH (APE training), and World Education (construction), and also with the Ministry of Education. In addition, CRS has collaborated with World Food Program to prevent duplication and ensure complementarity between interventions in Atacora.

CRS also meets with other organizations, such as PROSAF, Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival (BASICS), and Population Services International (PSI), but this is more of an information-exchange exercise than actual collaboration. The challenge remains creating synergy between the various components of an institution's program, while also setting up collaboration between different organizations to obtain a greater impact. Another major challenge is ensuring the sustainability of activities in the field.

Recommendations for SO 1

- Consider adding gender-disaggregated performance indicators in the performance monitoring plan. More specifically, the following indicators could be useful:
 - For IR1: Improved key pedagogical systems and inputs for delivery of a quality basic education, using the:
 - Percentage of female teachers with appropriate qualification and/or who received training, because female teachers can play a major role in girls' schooling, not only as role models, but as mentors. As such, they should be trained to guide girls in school.
 - Number of interactions between girls and the teacher as a percentage of all students' interactions with the teachers, corrected for the presence of girls in the classroom. It should be looked at in the context of the projects specifically targeting girls' education and measured through systematic direct classroom observation. A number of schools or classrooms within schools participating in programs to promote girls' education could be identified by education support personnel such as school directors and pedagogical advisors. Change in the participation of girls (at the beginning of the project and after a given period of time, preferably a year), in terms of their interaction with teachers who have participated in gender training activities, can be evaluated. This tool could be used by IFESH, for example, to assess the impact of its training in equity in the classroom.

- For IR 4: Increased civil and government participation in basic education, using the percentage of trained female members in trained APEs, or some other indicator of women’s participation.
- Consider eliminating Performance Data Table 1 from the R4 and replacing it with Performance Data Table 4, which gives gender-disaggregated gross enrollment data, hence providing a better picture of the inequities in the sector and allowing for targeted interventions to eliminate or at least reduce the existing gender gap.
- Give special attention in new programming to the issue of female teachers’ scarcity, especially in rural areas. Consider helping the government with the development of a female-teacher recruitment and incentive policy, as female teachers could act as role models and could greatly contribute to the promotion of girls’ education. Likewise, female teachers should have the same access to training and opportunities for professional advancement as male teachers. The contribution and experience of an NGO such as *Equi-Filles*, created by secondary-school female teachers, could be of great value in the pursuit of such efforts.
- Seek collaboration between existing credit programs and girls’ education to help increase women’s income, financial independence, and power in decision-making regarding their daughters’ education. This is particularly important considering the lack of female access to income and resources and the fact that household poverty remains one of the major barriers impeding female access to schooling.
- Integrate gender as a cross-cutting theme in all aspects of programming, and reinforce linkages between education, health, and democracy and governance programs.

Engage the government in discussions regarding different roles for the National Network for the Promotion of Girls’ Education and the Ministry of Education’s Office for the Promotion of Girls’ Education, to avoid duplication of efforts. The latter should have a political as well as a monitoring and supervisory role. It should, with the assistance of the Statistical Office of the Ministry of Education, identify priority intervention areas, on the basis of gender-disaggregated data for enrollment, performance, and retention. The office also should monitor and supervise implementation of the Gender Action Plan for the promotion of girls’ education. Its responsibilities should be markedly distinct from the advisory role assumed by the network. The network’s capacity to provide technical assistance to NGOs and APEs and coordinate all girls’ education programs/initiatives should be reinforced.

- Require gender-disaggregated data in reports of implementing partners. Such requirements should be included in the design of all new projects.

SO 2: Increase the use of family health services and preventive measures within a supportive policy environment.

The assessment team conducted interviews for, and in some cases reviewed documentation for, the activities below. None of these activities was originally designed to address gender issues specifically; rather, they were aimed predominantly at women with a focus on maternal and child health. Nonetheless, most of them have incorporated some measures to address gender disparities or barriers faced by women in order to achieve their objectives.

Integrated Promotion of Family Health in the Borgou and Alibori (PROSAF). PROSAF (*Promotion Intégrée de Santé Familiale dans le Borgou et l'Alibori*) is USAID/Benin's flagship health activity. It is implemented by University Research Corporation, with support from the Cooperative League of the U.S.A. (CLUSA), the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), and the local International Planned Parenthood affiliate, ABPF, or the Beninese Association for Family Health. The project period is from 1999 to 2003. The project's objective is to increase access to and demand for quality services, products, and preventive measures, and the activity is closely aligned with and central to the achievement of a large number of intermediate results (IRs) and sub-IRs across SO 2. Its objectives also largely conform with the Ministry of Health's strategic plan.

In addition to aiming its services predominantly at women, PROSAF has tried to encourage the selection of women as members of the co-management committees (COGECs) for health centers by using a more participatory process that follows established legal criteria. Despite these efforts to increase women's participation, there is still a low proportion of women on the co-management committees. The reasons cited for this are that these committees had long existed and there was no established process for renewing or changing their membership; therefore, predominantly male membership tended to persist. There are also few women serving as community facilitators, community-based service agents (ASBCs), or community health workers, even though PROSAF has tried to increase the number of women in these capacities. There was general agreement that having women in these positions might be more effective in meeting women's health needs (though the male community health workers are apparently doing well, at least for the six months they have been in place). The major impediment cited was the literacy requirement, as women are much less likely than men to be literate. PROSAF has tried to address this problem by establishing a literacy program for women in collaboration with a local NGO.

The recent assessment of PROSAF (Morton and Kessou, June 22, 2001) noted the surprising absence of social science studies to better understand the cultural, political, and psychological determinants affecting the types of behavioral change the program is trying to bring about, aside from some knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) studies. PROSAF did commission a study on health decision-making and use of resources at the household level through Frontiers (Population Council), and just completed a qualitative study on determinants of behavior with regard to prenatal care, vaccination of children, and contraceptive use (still in preliminary draft and not for quotation). This type of information brings to light gender-based factors that affect how decisions are made and whether money and time are spent obtaining services. As a result of the Frontiers study, which indicated that resource allocation for health care is largely controlled by men, PROSAF is now developing and disseminating, through traditional media and radio, messages aimed at men, to encourage them either to respond positively to women's requests for money to pay for health services,

or to let women make health-care decisions. The expectation is that men will be more amenable when they understand the importance of health care and the issues involved.

PROSAF has also found that factors within the health system affect the use of services, including disrespectful and unwelcoming treatment of women by health-care workers, untidiness of health centers, class differences between providers and clients, and common factors, such as the lack of medicine. These findings are informing PROSAF's efforts to improve the quality of services. For instance, because health workers do not speak local languages, inhibiting communication with women, PROSAF has encouraged health workers to become fluent and literate in local languages. A warm and comforting communications style and the way questions are asked are important in obtaining adequate information from women, as well as in imparting information effectively. PROSAF has found that there is an almost total lack of verification by health workers that women understand what they have been told. These factors appear to be bigger impediments to the use of services than is cost. It was noted that training programs are addressing these issues.

Cost poses a serious barrier to the indigent, as there is no provision for free services for those who cannot pay. Financial barriers to prenatal care exist, as the cost of the required four visits must be paid up front, to encourage compliance with the visits. In order to address this constraint, PROSAF is planning to start a *tontine* (rotating savings group), probably in collaboration with an NGO, to help women pay for prenatal services. The program has also established a solidarity-based savings mechanism (*caisse*) in one area to cover transportation for emergency obstetric care, and is trying to improve communications to get emergency transportation and care by investigating the use of solar-powered telephones, which would be paid for by the communities and health centers. PROSAF also plans to work more with men; for example, through outreach in religious gathering places and markets.

These initiatives demonstrate that, although gender is not a particular focus of PROSAF, the program has recognized gender barriers to achieving its objectives, and is trying to develop solutions for the problems encountered. Most of these initiatives are too recent to have shown concrete results, but they are likely to enhance program effectiveness if they are carried through. However, this creative focus on finding solutions to gender-based problems and the role that attention to gender plays in managing for results is not reflected in PROSAF reports or the mission's R4. There are no performance indicators that reflect the role of gender in program results. Such indicators could include client use of or satisfaction with services by gender, or indicators on participation by gender in any of the community participation mechanisms of the program.

PROSAF's collaboration with other USAID-supported activities has been somewhat limited. There is little incentive for collaboration because it is not built into the activities' contracts, and each activity is preoccupied with achieving its own objectives. There has been some collaboration with MCDI and World Education in common areas, with regard to health education in schools and collaboration with Parents' Associations. There has also been some coordination with PROLIPO/Africare and CARE, which is supporting ROBS, the network of health-care NGOs. There has been little contact with CRS, because of its distinct objectives and PL 480 funding. As noted in the Morton/Kessou assessment, a considerably greater—and

somewhat unrealistic—degree of synergy was expected, in which PROSAF was to take leadership in promoting synergy among all USAID-funded activities in Borgou/Alibori. Because PROSAF is the newest project in the area and incentives are lacking, it is not surprising that collaboration has been limited. Morton reports that other donors have accepted PROSAF's efforts, through the DDSP, to coordinate programming monthly and to work together on annual budgetized departmental and zone work plans.

PROSAF is working with seven local NGOs, to which it subcontracts specific activities, such as training village committees, implementing surveys, and conducting qualitative research. Most of the gender-related innovations instituted or planned by PROSAF are in collaboration with NGOs.

PROLIPO (Integrated Anti-Malarial Project, Ouémé). This community-based child survival and malaria prevention project (*Projet de Lutte Intégrée contre le Paludisme dans l'Ouémé*) is implemented by Africare under a grant from the Bureau for Humanitarian Response (BHR) in the Ouémé region. The mission is providing support, with Child Survival and Disease (CSD) funds, for the malaria component, the Africa Integrated Malaria Initiative (AIMI), in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). This integrated project is targeted at mothers with children under age five and pregnant women. Its goal is to reduce morbidity and mortality due to malaria and other childhood illnesses in these target groups. PROLIPO works with existing community groups, including women's groups.⁴⁸ Through the use of male and female promoters (*animateurs, animatrices*), the program introduces the use of insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets and the early diagnosis and treatment of malaria in children under age five and pregnant women, and promotes effective prevention and treatment of childhood illnesses using the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) methodology, which emphasizes intensive education and involvement of mothers and communities to adopt 16 key behaviors. This is the pilot program for the introduction of the IMCI methodology in Benin, following adoption of the IMCI policy by the government with mission support. PROLIPO also supports capacity strengthening for the departmental health directorate (DDSP), through training personnel in IMCI, participatory methodologies, and IEC and behavioral change, as well as supervision.

Community outreach uses many different methodologies and channels, including a range of existing community groups, theater, folklore, and radio. The program also uses prenatal consultations to promote the use of mosquito netting and IMCI.

A gender-related issue faced by the program is the inability of some women to afford the mosquito nets, despite efforts to make the cost as low as possible (currently CFA 3,600 to CFA 5,500, or US\$5.04 to US\$7.70), depending on size. The nets last five years and must be reimpregnated with insecticide every six months, at a cost of CFA 500, or US\$0.70. To address this cost problem, the program has started a credit or installment program to allow women to pay for the nets through periodic payments. PROLIPO is also planning a broader credit program, which would provide credit to women for income-generation purposes, with a portion going for the purchase of mosquito nets. This would address the access and cost problems, as well as contribute to improving the situation of women and families through

⁴⁸ The program also works with men, because of their important role in health-care decision-making.

increased income. A problem mentioned in this regard, however, is husbands' unwillingness to spend money or to allow their wives to have independent incomes. As with PROSAF, innovations to improve access to and use of services have not yet yielded specific results. No PROLIPO performance reports were available for the assessment team to review, and there is no mention in the R4 or any gender-sensitive indicators of PROLIPO activities.

PROLIPO has collaborated with PROSAF in developing appropriate messages for both women and men. The program also indicated that it had collaborated with BASICS, PSI, and PRIME/INTRAH (Innovative Technologies for Health Care Delivery).

GESCOME/CESH (Project for Community Involvement in Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene) is an activity implemented with CSD funding by the Environmental Health Project (EHP) in secondary cities in the Borgou region. Its focus is on improved sanitation (including both solid and liquid waste) and supply of potable water to stop the transmission of diarrheal disease. The program is addressed here under health, but is cross-sectoral with an important local governance focus on increasing community capacity, initiative, and collaboration between public authorities and local communities. The program works with the public sector and communities rather than with NGOs, in collaboration with the departmental commission for environmental sanitation, municipal teams (subprefecture), and health sector personnel. The departmental commission coordinates and supports the work of the municipal teams. The municipal teams, which include community volunteers, participate in the identification of environmental health problems through mapping exercises and analysis, and collaborate on microprojects to solve problems. Communities contribute 15 percent of the cost (in cash or in kind) and manage the projects, including maintenance and financial management, through a microproject management committee. The communities also establish fees and contributions.

One of the most important effects of the project has been building community capacity and bringing communities and local authorities together to identify and solve problems, strengthening communication links and opening doors to future collaboration. Although the health impact will be longer in coming and less readily identified, the fact that there were no incidents of cholera during the recent outbreak in areas where the project is working indicates the effectiveness of the sanitation measures supported.

Most members of the municipal teams have been male. The second phase of the project emphasized increased participation by women, requiring that at least two women be included per neighborhood, in recognition of the importance of improved hygiene to women. Although it is difficult to attribute specific project effects to women's increased participation, there has been a significant impact on women themselves, who noted that they are now better able to speak in public and work with their communities on activities. This increased capacity will remain in the communities.

Women's participation on municipal teams has also very likely strengthened the project's impact in reducing diarrheal disease, as women are more familiar with this problem than are men, and know how to talk to other women to promote change. In the Borgou region, where the sexes tend to segregate, women are more effective in reaching other women, particularly

married women. However, greater participation by women is affected by the limitations women face with regard to education, lack of autonomy, and lack of time due to their heavy workload. Most of the women on the municipal teams are young and unmarried, as secondary education is required. Although this is an exclusionary factor limiting female participation, it is less so in secondary cities than in rural areas.

Efforts to increase women's participation have been made, and positive results have been noted in both the health and democracy and governance objectives. No performance reports were available for review, and there is nothing available in USAID documentation that mentions gender as an important factor in this (or any) health project, nor is there any mention in the R4 of the cross-sectoral links with local governance.

Collaboration with other programs was noted as an issue—it is very difficult to achieve effective synergies and collaboration unless it is planned in advance, for example, by starting projects at the same time, with compatible timeframes and approaches, to create conditions in which collaboration can proceed, and to promote and leave space for collaborative efforts. Otherwise, projects tend to focus on their own results, rather than on collaboration, which they tend to see as a distraction. GESCOME has found it difficult to collaborate with other projects, though it has collaborated with MCDI's school health education program to some degree. The fact that the two programs use quite different methodologies has been a barrier, as MCDI works with NGOs and promoters, while GESCOME works with combined public-sector and community municipal teams.

CRS. The maternal/child health and nutrition program is the largest PL 480 Title II activity implemented by CRS. (CRS also supports school canteen and informal education/literacy activities, as noted above.) The program works with 85 social centers of the MSPFS, which serve 400 communities, targeting about 60,000 women with children under age three, or who are pregnant or lactating. The food component is being deemphasized by gradually decreasing the amounts distributed, to help make the communities less dependent on food distribution and increase their involvement in sustainable activities. Similarly, the program is gradually shifting from a social center-based to a more community-based approach.

Children under age three and women are targeted as beneficiaries because they are most vulnerable to food insecurity because of high nutritional needs and very limited resources to meet those needs. The objective of the program is to improve maternal health and child nutrition through child survival interventions, food assistance, and community development activities. The subobjectives are:

- To improve child nutrition by improving the knowledge and practice of maternal and child health care by mothers of children under age three;
- To improve the nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women through education in maternal risk reduction, promotion of prenatal care, and provision of food supplements; and

- To promote and improve the level of development of the 400 target communities by providing local maternal/child health services and supporting community development activities.

The community development projects include income generation and microcredit through community banks. CRS plans to cover at least 5,000 community bank clients (predominantly women) in the departments of Ouémé and Borgou during the 2001 to 2005 period, with the objective of increasing family incomes of clients by 15 percent to 25 percent.

As with the other programs, there is no gender-sensitive reporting in the R4. CRS methods and approaches targeting women have been developed as a result of its experience in Benin and throughout the world. These methods are being constantly refined, particularly with regard to achieving synergies among the various elements of the CRS program. CRS also seeks coordination with other programs, and has collaborated with PROSAF, BASICS, and PSI. Periodic information-sharing meetings have been useful, and have helped spark new ideas, although it is recognized that there is room for improvement in achieving coordination and synergies. CRS takes a different approach from most USAID-supported programs, due both to its PL 480 funding and the fact that it works with the MSPFS rather than the Ministry of Health. The biggest challenge facing the CRS program is sustainability, particularly in light of the current five-year limit for achieving sustainability.

PAIR/ROBS. The Project for Institutional Support to the Network of Beninese Health NGOs (PAIR, *Projet d'Appui Institutionnel au Réseau*) is implemented by CARE. The Network of Beninese Health NGOs (*Réseau des ONGs Beninoises de Santé*, ROBS), created in 1997, was initially supported by the Global Bureau's POLICY Project prior to CARE's involvement, with USAID/Benin funding. Both have provided institutional support and capacity-building assistance for the network, which in turn supports its member NGOs through coordination, advocacy, training, and help in securing financing for activities. The PAIR program was officially launched in April 2000. It provides institutional strengthening to ROBS itself, and to a competitively selected group of 10 member NGOs meeting rigorous selection criteria. The project focuses on developing the capacity of the ROBS network to serve its approximately 90 member NGOs, and to develop the credibility and capacity of the 10 selected NGOs to improve their health services and community outreach. The entire membership of ROBS will benefit through a series of workshops and presentations to share experience and methodologies developed through the PAIR project.

PAIR has no specific focus on gender, other than the fact that most health projects target women and there are many women in ROBS' member NGOs and the network. Gender training is not included in the institutional-strengthening project. The network and its members have tried to increase the use of female health personnel, especially in reproductive health, where they note that it is more effective to use female personnel to reach women.

Recommendations for SO 2

- Give increased emphasis to opening greater opportunities to women to serve on health co-management and other health-related community committees and as community outreach workers, by promoting selection of women by communities, extending efforts to qualify more women through literacy training, and exploring and advocating feasible modifications in selection criteria to reduce barriers to women.
- Continue and increase, if possible, the use of studies that illuminate social, cultural, and economic determinants of health-service use, including gender-differentiated factors among different ethnic groups; and track and report progress in addressing such issues.
- Conduct a baseline study on men's attitudes and willingness to support access to health services by their wives and children. Increase outreach to men to encourage greater understanding of the importance of health care and greater moral and financial support to their wives in seeking health care for themselves and their children, and conduct a follow-up study to assess change.
- Seek collaboration with existing credit and labor-saving technology programs to help increase women's incomes and ability to afford health services and products such as mosquito nets, and to help reduce their workload and permit them time to participate.
- Seek broader collaboration with existing literacy training programs for women to help increase women's access to health information, access to participation in community committees or as health workers, and access to greater economic opportunities and income.
- In the planned new HIV/AIDS activity, consider including measures targeted at married women and adolescent girls, among the groups least likely to be able to protect themselves against infection.
- In the R4 narrative, mention efforts to increase participation in and use of services by addressing gender barriers, together with any positive results these efforts help achieve.
- Consider adding a performance indicator on client satisfaction with and use of services by gender, to measure changes in both women's and men's satisfaction and/or use—and perhaps spouses' and children's use also, in the case of men.
- Consider adding a performance indicator on participation by gender in community committees (COGECs), under IR 1.2, or incorporate a dimension on participation by gender in the index for indicator 4 under IR 1.2 (performance index for COGECs). More equitable participation on COGECs should be a measure of their effective capacity to plan and manage services that reach the entire community, particularly the principal target group, women. This aspect should also be reported in the R4 narrative. Synergies with democracy/governance achieved by more equitable participation on COGECs should also be highlighted.

SPO: Improve governance and strengthen democracy.

The team focused on the activities in the democracy and governance (DG) portfolio in which gender issues are relevant. The Vital-Finance and ATI activities (see below), which have an economic-growth focus, are included in the DG portfolio on the assumption that increased income will encourage beneficiaries to participate in local development and pay local taxes, and will also encourage community involvement in local decision-making as community members have a greater stake in economic activities. Increased income will also improve access to education and health services, particularly by increasing women's income or helping them save money, thus creating additional synergies in USAID's program.

Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA)/Vital-Finance. This microcredit project began in 1998 with VITA assistance, which was phased out in 2000. Vital-Finance is now an independent local institution that receives USAID/Benin support, although at a decreasing rate the organization becomes progressively self-sustaining. Vital-Finance also has a credit line supported by another NGO.

Vital-Finance provides credit to those lacking access to banks through three branches in Cotonou, Porto Novo, and Parakou, plus outreach promoters (*chargés*) who work directly with clients. Most loans are for microenterprises. Loans range from CFA 50,000 (US\$70) to CFA 5 million (US\$7,000). Both individual and solidarity-group loans are available, with individual loans going to those who can provide some type of collateral. In solidarity groups, in which the group guarantees repayment, the loan is made to the group, with each individual getting the same amount for his or her individual use; payments are made to the group, then by the group to Vital-Finance. The interest rate is 2 percent per month on the remaining balance, although the loan term is usually quite short, averaging about three weeks for women. The demand for credit exceeds the supply.

Although it was not set up specifically to serve women, or to take gender into account, Vital-Finance has given 84 percent of its loans thus far to women, including 73 percent of the individual loans and 91 percent of the group loans. Women have received 69 percent of the total amount loaned to individuals and 91 percent of the total amount loaned to groups, for a total of 75 percent of the total amount loaned. Experience has confirmed that women pay back their loans at a higher rate than do men, with a 99-percent repayment rate.

The R4 reports the percentage of women beneficiaries and includes an indicator on the percentage of loans serving the very poor, including women, but it is not clearly disaggregated by gender; that is, it is unclear what percentage of the "very poor" comprises women.

Appropriate Technology International (ATI). This appropriate technology project is implemented by Appropriate Technology International (ATI is now known as Enterprise Works Worldwide; its local affiliate is still known as ATI/Benin). This activity began in 1997 and is now ending its first phase and negotiating the next three-year phase. It is 100 percent financed by USAID/Benin. Its goal is to improve partner and client incomes and/or reduce household expenses, enabling beneficiaries to increase their investments in health and

education, as well as contribute to local development and the tax base. ATI promotes the manufacture and use of improved technologies, including irrigation pumps or tube wells for market gardening, hybrid oil palms and palm-oil presses, and improved charcoal-burning stoves. Local small businesses are trained to produce products incorporating these improved technologies, and local retailers sell them.

The only component specifically aimed at women (primarily as users) is the improved-stove activity, which has produced substantial savings for households because the stoves use 50 percent less charcoal than ordinary stoves. Over a two-month period, about 2,600 stoves per month were sold. Since the beginning of the activity in February 2000, there has been a cumulative total of US\$479,000 in profit to manufacturers and retailers and savings to households. For the month of July 2001, savings amounted to CFA 38,161,000 (US\$53,425), and profits totaled CFA 3,582,000 (US\$5,015). There has also been a significant environmental impact, with about 3,287,000 tons of charcoal saved, the equivalent of 470 hectares of forest. A survey of households using the stoves revealed that 80 percent of the savings realized have been used for education, health, home improvements, or food. Local tinsmiths produce the stoves, and a workshop in Porto Novo produces the ceramic liners. About 210 women retail the stoves, nearly all in the Cotonou/Porto Novo area, where charcoal is used for cooking. Few are sold in other parts of the country, where wood is predominantly used. The women selling the stoves make about CFA 400 (US\$0.56) per stove. The ceramic manufacturer also makes that amount per stove, and the tinsmiths make CFA 700 (US\$0.98) (no women are involved in manufacturing the stoves).

Because of the significant investment in land, trees, and equipment, the hybrid palm-growing and oil-pressing component tends to be male-dominated, although men often make the investments and their wives run the business, as palm-oil extraction is traditionally a women's activity. ATI developed improved hybrid oil palms and manual or motorized palm-oil presses, which are manufactured locally by the Songhai Center. Women also participate as members of palm-oil cooperatives. One such cooperative has about 500 members, two-thirds of whom are women. In this cooperative, the men provide the land, and the women provide labor. About 5 or 6 of the 34 nurseries producing hybrid palm trees are run by women's groups. There are now about 60 palm-oil businesses using ATI technology making an average profit of US\$10,000 to US\$15,000, although one business has made US\$100,000. The total economic impact of improved palm-oil production to date is estimated at approximately \$700,000 (exact figures for the last December-to-June season are not yet available). ATI has not done a study on the use of the profits from palm oil, but may do so.

The market-gardening component is male-dominated. Of about 1,000 participating gardeners, fewer than 10 percent are women. Market gardeners engage in small-scale intensive dry-season farming, using manual irrigation pumps or tube wells developed by ATI and manufactured by Songhai. Constraints to participation by women include access to land and the cost of irrigation pumps (CFA 75,000, or US\$105) or wells. ATI made an agreement with Vital-Finance to provide credit to rural market gardeners to help them buy pumps and other inputs, but it did not work well because Vital-Finance's urban orientation was not appropriate for a rural credit program. Therefore, the arrangement was dropped after the one-year agreement expired. ATI is now exploring establishing a credit program through local NGOs

already working in rural market-gardening areas, or through other internationally sponsored programs.

The impact of the ATI activities is not reported by gender in the R4, nor are any indicators showing the program's impact reported in the R4. There are internal performance monitoring indicators on the number of pumps and presses sold, but none that indicates impact by gender.

ATI's main USAID-supported collaborator are the Songhai Centers, which manufacture stoves, pumps, and presses, conduct sunflower research, and produce onion seed, among other things. ATI has also collaborated with World Education in developing sample palm plantations at schools, which are run by the Parents' Associations. ATI also works with local NGOs, mostly in promoting market gardening. The only public-sector partner is the government's palm-oil research station, which provides training.

ALCRER. *ALCRER (Association de Lutte contre le Racisme, l'Ethnocentrisme et le Regionalisme, or Association against Racism, Ethnocentrism and Regionalism)* is a local NGO that has received a USAID/Benin grant to conduct workshops to sensitize opinion leaders with regard to the decentralization program (direct election of local councils) that is about to begin. The assessment team made an impromptu visit to a facility in Lokossa where a workshop had just concluded and met briefly with the organizers. The workshops cover the rights and responsibilities of local leaders in the decentralization process. Reportedly, the roles of women are discussed in the workshops, as is the imbalance of power and rights that impedes their participation. Women participate in the workshops, but there are more men, and men tend to be the leaders. Women participants are interested in the implications of decentralization for them. ALCRER indicated that it would like to work with women's groups on decentralization issues, if USAID were to approve and make more resources available.

Education for Development and Democracy Initiatives (EDDI). This is a new, U.S. Congress-funded (small project fund) activity under EDDI. This 18-month activity is implemented by the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) through local NGOs and NGO networks to help overcome constraints to greater participation by women. This activity is in addition to EDDI projects in Benin on girls' education. Its purpose is to reduce constraints to women's full participation in civic and economic activities and promote their empowerment. The activity promotes knowledge and use of legal rights and addresses domestic violence and harmful practices such as forced marriage and genital cutting. It promotes income generation, access to credit, and literacy in local languages. Obstacles faced by the program include women's lack of power and heavy load of responsibilities, lack of understanding of women's situations by men and resistance to change, and practical constraints such as the provision of subsidized credit by some NGOs, which makes it difficult to institute sustainable credit programs that fully cover costs. The activity is now in the strategy-development stage. It intends to work in focus zones on very specific targets, in collaboration with existing women's NGOs (one of which, G/PiFeD, also participated in the Global Women in Politics activity with four women's NGOs, which ended last year), but the specifics are still being defined. This is the only current activity visited that specifically

addresses gender issues as such. Because it is a special initiative (congressionally funded), it is not clear how this activity relates to the mission's DG portfolio and whether it will contribute directly to achieving the SPO objectives and indicators.

Recommendations

- Continue support for the development of viable microfinance institutions and programs in Benin, either directly through institutional support, or indirectly through improving the policy and regulatory environment, if resources permit.
- Strengthen efforts to reach more women in the market-gardening and palm-oil components of the ATI program by promoting outreach to women engaged in agriculture, including cooperatives with a significant number of women members, and by promoting access to credit by both women and men to buy the necessary inputs through collaboration with existing credit programs.
- Consider, within the ATI program, introducing other technologies that might be particularly effective in helping women save time, labor, and money, thereby giving them a greater opportunity to participate in community organizations and increase their access to resources.
- Continue and, if possible, increase support for women's participation in the decentralization process and promote women's candidacies for election as local council members, as well as in politics in general. Support for outreach and motivational efforts directed to women by local NGOs, based on the Platform for Women's Participation in Decision-Making developed by a group of NGOs (G/PiFeD) with support from USAID's Global Women in Politics program, would be helpful. The importance of participation by women should be stressed in the decentralization workshops for opinion leaders now being conducted.
- Ensure that any new special objective or activity related to agriculture offers opportunities to and tracks participation of and benefits to both women and men. The current draft proposal for a new SPO includes two results under which initiatives to improve the situation of women could be included. The proposed new IR 1, improved environment for private and local initiatives, could encompass the following:
 - Under IR 1.1, make agriculture and agro-processing technologies, as well as other labor-saving technologies to free time for productive activities, available and accessible to women, either individually or through cooperatives or other groups; ensure that information about export opportunities reaches female as well as male producers, by selecting appropriate communication channels, media, and languages.
 - Under IR 1.2, efforts to increase local-community access to financial resources could explore ways to expedite land titling for women as well as men (individually or in cooperatives) so that land could be used as collateral for agricultural credit. The

- possibility of instituting joint titling for couples could also be explored, which would contribute to strengthening women’s property rights and help undermine discriminatory customary inheritance practices.
- Under IR 2, increased participation of civil society and local communities in decision-making, IR 2.1 (indigenous agricultural associations and cooperatives strengthened) offers opportunities to ensure that women’s groups and cooperatives are included, and that women are encouraged to join or form such organizations.
 - IR 2.2 (advocacy capacity of NGO networks, women’s groups, and associations strengthened) could strengthen advocacy capacity on the issue of land rights and land titles for women and women’s groups and/or joint titling for couples, among other issues.
 - IR 2.3 (new technologies for information and communication increased) could seek to ensure that women and women’s organizations as well as men have access to such technologies, and that they are used to reach both women and men effectively.
- Strengthen reporting on efforts to address gender disparities in the R4, including the impact (and efforts to increase the impact) of ATI activities on women as well as men; and the impact and importance of microcredit in improving the disadvantaged situation of women, as well as the percentage of loans to women. Outreach to women on political participation and decentralization should be noted, particularly synergies achieved by working with NGOs strengthened through USAID support. Any results, such as election of female local council members, should be noted. Synergies achieved through work on health or education activities with NGOs strengthened through DG programs should also be noted in the R4.
 - Consider adding a performance indicator on ATI beneficiaries with regard to number and increased income or savings, by gender, for all components of the program.
 - If a new agriculture SPO is adopted, develop gender-sensitive performance indicators relevant to the activities mentioned in the foregoing recommendations.

Recommendations for a Cross-cutting Approach to Gender Integration through Policies, Structures, and Procedures That Favor Gender-Integrated, Synergistic Programming

The following sections of the strategy are cross-cutting, relating to mission programming and implementation across all program sectors. The characteristics or components of the strategic approach proposed are briefly summarized to provide a vision of the overall approach for implementing the actions recommended.

Adopt a cross-cutting approach. Most important, because gender issues affect all development sectors, a strategic approach to reducing gender barriers and enhancing

developmental impact must cut across all existing program objectives, and should cut across any new objectives developed.

Strengthen the current program. Although current objectives and activities cannot be greatly modified, some steps can be taken to address gender issues within the current program and activities and, especially, to measure and report impact more effectively by taking gender into account.

Develop policies, structures, and procedures that favor gender-integrated, synergistic programming. Policies and systems need to be put in place to ensure implementation of the proposed gender strategy. These include adopting a policy, creating implementation and monitoring structures, adopting guidelines for ensuring gender integration in future programming, and promoting collaboration and synergies.

Develop local capacity to promote and implement gender-sensitive programs. Effective implementation of USAID/Benin's program, and achievement of the development objectives set forth by USAID/Benin and other donors and, especially, by the Government of Benin as set forth in the National Policy for the Promotion of Women, depends on developing sustainable local capacity to identify, address, and undertake effective advocacy and action on development issues, including the substantial gender gap in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making. Local NGOs constitute a substantial and valuable resource for advocating and implementing development programs. Many local NGOs are working to improve the situation of women or include attention to gender issues among their activities. However, most are new, small, and lack access to institutional-development, technical, and financial resources. An essential component of the current gender strategy is to develop and support this incipient local capacity and to promote partnerships with USAID/Benin's program. The strategy proposes creation of a sustainable technical support and coordination entity for local NGOs working on gender issues in any sector.

Develop a mission order. A mission order should be developed to support implementation of the gender strategy, making gender a priority concern and mandating a cross-sectoral approach and coordination among all program objectives and activities with regard to gender integration. (Draft points for such a mission order are attached as Annex D.)

Adopt a coordinating structure. Create a cross-sectoral coordination and monitoring mechanism, representing all SOs/SPOs and major activities, composed of members with decision-making authority, to ensure gender integration. This could perhaps best be achieved by adapting the existing synergy committee to undertake responsibility for gender as well as synergy, as gender and synergy are both cross-cutting issues and are highly complementary. This gender and synergy committee would be responsible for overseeing implementation of the gender strategy across the entire program, as well as ensuring maximum synergy in all areas of the USAID program, including gender. Members should be allowed adequate time and the necessary resources to carry out this responsibility, including periodic visits to monitor activities outside Cotonou. The general role and responsibilities of this coordination structure are outlined in the draft points for a mission order (Annex D).

Develop guidelines for new programming. Develop and disseminate guidelines to ensure adequate attention to gender and adherence to the cross-sectoral gender strategy by all new objectives and activities. These could include provisions such as the following:

- New strategic plans adopted by the mission should reflect the cross-cutting, integrated approach to gender issues outlined in this gender strategy by documenting relevant gender issues and linking them to the strategic approach, illustrative interventions, and results framework outlined in the strategic plan.
- SO/SPO/RP and activity identification processes should include gender analysis to determine the extent to which gender is relevant to achieving proposed results and to specific activities and in what ways, with support from the WID officer, the gender and synergy committee, or external technical assistance, as needed. The feasibility of various alternatives for or means of addressing relevant gender issues should be thoroughly explored (see ADS 201.3.6.3 on gender).
- Results frameworks for new objectives and designs for new activities for which gender is a relevant factor should be specific regarding the gender issues that will affect results, actions to address them, and results expected to be achieved.
- Activity designs should ensure that adequate personnel and budgets are allocated to address effectively gender issues in all relevant activities.
- Timeframes for activities should be adequate to achieve the gender-related results sought.
- RFPs, RFAs, and similar documents soliciting proposals should require attention to gender, unless the SO/RP team specifically decides that gender is not relevant and will not be incorporated and documents that decision in accordance with ADS requirements (see sections 303.5.5b and E303.5.5b4).
- Proposal selection criteria should include the ability to address gender issues unless gender is determined to be irrelevant. Additionally, the appropriateness of the proposed design, activities, budget, and staff should be assessed in that regard (such criteria should be applied to both solicited and unsolicited proposals).
- The performance monitoring plan and indicators should reflect and appropriately measure results by gender.
- Performance reporting in the R4 should indicate the importance of gender issues to the results sought and achieved, as well as report concrete results.

Plan for collaboration and synergy. In designing activities, build in incentives and opportunities for collaboration and synergy in implementing the gender strategy (and the program as a whole). Measures such as the following should be considered:

- Promote collaboration between USAID-funded programs. Identifying opportunities and promoting collaboration between SOs/SPOs should be an important function of the gender and synergy committee mentioned above, but each SO/SPO team should be responsible for taking the necessary action to achieve effective collaboration. Such collaboration should go beyond mere reporting. It must start at the project conception and preparation stage to allow compatibility between the approaches used, otherwise, synergy will only remain a concept as long as each organization and project has its own objectives and is seeking different results. Collaborative planning should be required if successful partnerships are to be attained. Once implementation starts, different organizations are too absorbed by the attainment of their own objectives to focus on collaboration.
- When planning new activities, consider how they might relate to existing USAID-supported activities in the same geographic area across all program sectors. Again, the gender and synergy committee should review activity plans to ensure that these elements are taken into account effectively. Aspects to consider include objectives, target groups, partner organizations, outreach methodologies, community organization and participation mechanisms, and activity timeframes. All these should be assessed to identify complementarity and opportunities, and avoid creating new structures, mechanisms, and processes if existing ones could be adopted or used.
- Ensure that contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements promote collaboration and synergy by identifying such opportunities, by making the expectations for collaboration clear and concrete, and by indicating possible forms of collaboration. Require reporting to include efforts and results regarding collaboration and assessment of synergies achieved. The gender and synergy committee should review reports prior to finalization.
- Allow sufficient flexibility in activity timeframes and deadlines to permit sufficient time to develop and implement collaborative endeavors.

Recommendations for Sustainable Development of Local Capacity

- Support the development of a sustainable technical support and coordination entity, such as an NGO service center, for local NGOs and networks working on gender issues in any development sector. The purpose of this organization, which should preferably be set up on a nonprofit basis, would be to strengthen the ability of Beninese NGOs, women's groups, and networks to address gender issues effectively, either in partnership with a donor agency or through their own independent programs. Because most NGOs engaged in social and economic development inevitably deal with women or gender to some extent in their activities, this organization could serve the great majority of the NGOs and networks operating in Benin.⁴⁹ Also, such an entity would greatly facilitate coordination and communication—a need expressed by many of those interviewed—between these very diverse organizations on issues of common concern, without displacing or competing with networks already in existence. It is likely that the existence of such a

⁴⁹ This assessment identified 66 such organizations and a dozen existing networks, and it is highly likely that others exist or may be created.

support organization could foster interest among NGOs in working on gender issues, but that would be a by-product rather than the purpose of the support organization.

If possible, develop this capacity in an existing organization that is willing to take on this role, rather than creating a new entity that might duplicate existing capacity. This entity would provide technical support, gender and managerial training, organizational development, communications and information exchange, and fund-raising assistance (for example, assistance in developing proposals, facilitating contacts with donor agencies, or soliciting private-sector support) to local NGOs, community-based organizations, and NGO networks.

The organization should be set up to be sustainable after USAID support ends, through collection of membership fees, fees for service, diversification of donor support, private-sector fund-raising, or some combination of these. Nonprofit status should also help this organization provide services affordably.

This option could be implemented over a three- to five-year period, with five years preferable, to allow the organization to develop adequate sustainability strategies. Implementing this option would require a significant new investment in technical assistance, training, institutional and staff-support funding, office rent, equipment, and at least one vehicle, but developing such an entity would better strengthen NGOs and NGO networks in Benin than would simply creating another network specializing in gender and women's issues. Several such networks already exist, and one more could be seen as competition, possibly drawing away members from existing networks, or it simply could fail to stand out and attract enough members to be viable. Establishing an NGO support and service organization avoids these problems by (1) offering a higher level of services than local networks are generally able to provide; (2) providing services to networks as well as to individual NGOs; and (3) operating on a cost-recovery basis to the extent practical, as a source of quality services for all, not as a competitor.

Adopting this option would also create a resource for the implementation of future USAID-supported activities, as well as initiatives supported by the Government of Benin—particularly advocacy and implementation of the National Policy for the Promotion of Women and the Gender Action Plan. It would also serve as a resource for programs supported by other donors, which should help broaden its support base. Perhaps most important, it would help develop an independent capacity among local NGOs to develop gender-sensitive programs, advocacy, and initiatives of their own, lessening dependency on donor support.

- If the creation of such a technical support entity is not possible because of resource constraints, encourage and support, to the extent possible, the development of a network of local NGOs working on gender issues, across sectors, to promote the exchange of information, coordination of efforts, and mutual support to help them develop their capacity. Again, preference should be given to expanding and strengthening an existing network, rather than creating a new one. Some technical assistance and other support costs would remain, but costs would probably be significantly lower than for the first

option. Although such a network is unlikely to be as effective in strengthening capacity, it could make a contribution to the rapidly growing NGO sector, and perhaps eventually attract sufficient interest and support to develop a broader range of services for its members.

- Ensure that USAID-supported programs give preference to working with the local NGOs and networks supported by either of these options, in implementing gender-related activities across the entire program.

Recommendations for Strengthening Linkages with Other Donors

- Encourage other donors to provide support to the above-mentioned technical support entity (including seeking agreement among likely donors in selecting an existing organization to strengthen, rather than starting a new one), or to the network of gender-related NGOs if insufficient funding (from all donor sources) is available for the technical support entity.
- Encourage other donors to make use of these local NGOs in implementing their gender-related programs.
- Coordinate gender-related activities in support of this gender strategy with those supported by other donors to help avoid duplication or competition and ensure broader and more complete coverage, both thematically and geographically. Seek greater collaboration between donors to develop integrated projects. Not only will such an approach avoid duplication and waste, it could also prevent or at least reduce interministerial competition usually caused by insufficient resources. As one of Benin's main donors in the education sector, USAID could assume the leading role in that collaboration process.
- USAID/Benin could propose as a model for donor coordination its efforts to increase coordination and synergy among its own programs (if the foregoing recommendations to that effect are successfully adopted). USAID could also, as a requirement for the activities it supports, include coordination with the programs of other donors to the extent possible, as well as with other USAID-supported activities, using guidelines similar to those outlined above.

Recommendations for Additional Technical Assistance to Implement the Gender Strategy

The mission should request additional technical assistance to help with the following:

- Formation and orientation of the gender and synergy coordinating committee. This should include determining the committee's composition, roles, responsibilities, and specific functions.

- Training of gender and synergy committee members and all members of each of the SO/SPO teams in how to identify and address gender issues in the different program sectors, how to identify and develop cross-cutting synergies with regard to gender, and how to monitor and report on performance.
- Development of an implementation plan, with specific assignment of responsibilities and timeframes, for action on those recommendations in this strategy deemed feasible and accepted by the mission.
- Development of a feasibility study and design for an NGO service center, or other means of enhancing the capacity of local NGOs to work effectively on gender issues and of improving the situation of women in Benin.

The first three items should be done first and concurrently. It is estimated that this would require one or two consultants with both gender and sectoral expertise in the program areas (at least one should have experience in gender training) for a period of two to three weeks. The last item should be done separately, when the mission has determined the level of resources available to carry out such an activity.

ANNEX A
SCOPE OF WORK

SCOPE OF WORK

SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROSSCUTTING STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN TO INTEGRATE GENDER INTO USAID/BENIN'S PROGRAM PORTFOLIO

I. BACKGROUND

In Benin, as in all developing countries in the world, women contribute substantially to national production as well as household income. However, the majority of them, especially those in rural areas, continue to face numerous constraints including greater poverty, limited access to land and capital, and the lack of political, social and decision-making powers.

USAID/Benin's three Strategic Objective Teams (SOTs) integrate tacitly gender considerations into their program activities. For example, the Basic Education Team (BET) supported the institutionalization of a network for the promotion of girls' education. The Family Health Team (FHT) works with women's NGOs to disseminate health-related information. The Democracy and Governance Team (DGT), with the support of the Global Women in Politics, an American PVO, created a network of four grassroots women's NGOs. This network aims to encourage women to participate in the decision-making process.

In spite of this, opportunities for women's participation in the decision-making process still remain closed. The mission is now envisioning the development a three-to-five year cross sectoral gender strategy that will involve all three SOTs. Based on successful USAID-supported women's activities in Nigeria, USAID/Benin will encourage existing organizations and different interest groups to focus on coalition-building and networking for the implementation of this strategy. The mission needs to assess the current situation of such organizations, as well as explore possibilities to integrate gender considerations into the country program portfolio as a crosscutting theme. USAID/Benin is hereby requesting technical assistance from G/WID through its WIDTECH contract to achieve this goal.

USAID/BENIN STRATEGIC AND SPECIAL OBJECTIVES

USAID/Benin's strategy is comprised of two strategic objectives and one special objective, in accordance with the U.S. Strategic Plan for International Affairs (SPIA), the mission Performance Plan (MPP) for Benin and USAID agency goals. These support economic development, democracy, human capacity, and world population and human health.

USAID/Benin's current strategic objectives (SO) and special objective (SpO) are:

SO 1: More children receive, on an equitable basis, a basic education that prepares them for productive roles in society;

SO 2: Increased use of family health services and preventive measures within a supportive policy environment; and

SPO: Improved governance and strengthened democracy.

The Benin mission's program supports the achievement of USAID's goals:

- "Human Capacity built through education and training" and "Access to quality basic education, especially for girls and women, expanded;"
- "World population stabilized and human health protected;" and
- "Strengthened democracy and good governance" and its objectives of more genuine and competitive political processes; increased development of politically active civil society; and, more transparent and accountable government institutions."

II PURPOSE

The purpose of this Scope of Work is to obtain the services of a team of two Consultants to develop a mission-wide cross-sectoral strategy on gender and development, in order to increase women's participation in Benin's development process.

III. TASKS

Conduct a gender assessment that includes the following activities: □

- Analyze Benin's institutional, legal and regulatory environment to determine the opportunities and constraints to promoting gender considerations:
- Analyze the extent to which Benin integrates gender issues in its development strategies;
- Assess existing NGOs as well as public institutions intervening in gender issues and assess their management capacities and their willingness to form coalitions and networks;
- Identify women's professional organizations, interest groups and community-based organizations, with motivated members willing to play an active role in carrying out gender issues at all levels, national as well as grassroots;
- Assess USAID/Benin's present strategy and results framework, program and activities to identify possible links with regard to women's issues in all areas of SO 1, SO 2 and the SPO;
- Assess possible entry-points for the incorporation of gender considerations into ongoing activities;
- Verify whether the women's component in USAID/Benin's strategy and results framework reflects the key role of gender considerations in the achievement of USAID goals;
- Under each strategic objective, determine whether the key role of gender in development is addressed adequately;
- Determine whether gender considerations are addressed adequately in mission policies and activities.

Based on the assessment findings, and in collaboration with SOTs, make recommendations for possible actions and assist the mission in:

- Developing a strategy for strengthening and incorporating gender into USAID/Benin's results packages as a crosscutting theme;

- Initiate or improve gender integration in its SOs/SPO for both program activities and the results framework to ensure that programs include and/or better serve women;
- Suggest gender indicators for program impact and approaches for the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data; and,
- Provide guidance to revise, where appropriate, Intermediate Results (IRs) to incorporate gender considerations and data collection to include gender-sensitive indicators.

Facilitate a half-day briefing session for USAID staff, implementing partners and capable NGOs that were identified by assessment, in order to motivate them to play active roles in the strategy implementation process. The purpose of this session is to present and receive feedback on the Assessment's findings.

After consultation with USAID/Benin, finalize a mission-wide crosscutting gender strategy that integrates existing activities related to women and girls.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Prior to departure for Benin, the Consultants shall review documents to be forwarded to them□ by the mission and WIDTECH. These will include: □

- Mission policy and planning documents, such as the current Country Strategic Plan and R4s;
- Background information available on gender issues in Benin, such as UNDP reports and MONEE reports and other in-country data;
- Gender assessment reports and action plans from other partners or countries, which can be used as models by the team; and
- USAID/M/OP procurement guidelines.

In carrying out the data collection phase of the work, the Consultant team shall interview the following groups and collect related information:

- Members of the mission's SOTs and the Program Office.
- A sample of USAID/Benin's implementing partners, as identified by the mission in advance (in order to facilitate appointments) and approved by the mission.
- A sample of USAID-funded NGOs, as identified by the mission in advance (in order to facilitate appointments) and approved by the mission.
- A wide range of women's professional NGOs and grassroots interest groups, as identified by the mission in advance (in order to facilitate appointments) and approved by the mission.
- Major donors or other international organizations that have important gender programs in Benin, as identified by the mission in advance (in order to facilitate appointments) and approved by the mission.

V. DELIVERABLES

Gender assessment and a cross-sectoral gender strategy: The gender assessment and cross□ sectoral strategy will use the data from interviews and secondary sources to assess the□ appropriate technical areas requiring WID emphasis and make recommendations for future□

actions for gender integration, as described above in the first (A) and second (B) tasks. The documents, a gender assessment report and a cross-sectoral gender strategy, will also determine whether additional technical assistance from USAID/Washington is needed.

Preliminary drafts of the deliverables, a gender assessment report and a cross-sectoral gender strategy, shall be submitted to the mission upon completion of fieldwork, with electronic copies forwarded to the mission and WIDTECH not later than two weeks after the completion of the fieldwork. The two recipients will provide written comments to the Consultant Team Leader electronically within 5 working days of their receipt of the preliminary drafts of the deliverables.

The draft assessment report and the draft gender strategy, incorporating mission and WIDTECH comments, shall be submitted to the mission and WIDTECH not later than 5 working days after receiving their above comments. The mission and WIDTECH shall provide any additional written comments electronically within 5 working days of receipt of the revised drafts.

The final gender assessment report and the final cross-sectoral gender strategy will be submitted to the mission and WIDTECH within 10 working days after receiving comments on the revised drafts.

All deliverables shall be submitted in English.

VI. ESTIMATED LEVEL OF EFFORT

It is anticipated that the services of the Consultants will be required for up to 31 days each, including travel. The Consultants will have up to three days for preparation beforehand, four days for travel, 24 days in country, and four days at home to complete the draft and final documents. A six-day workweek will be authorized overseas.

VII. PERFORMANCE PERIOD

It is anticipated that this work will begin approximately on August 29, 2001. According to this planned performance period, the consultants will be arriving in Benin by no later than September 3, 2001. The work will be completed by September 29, 2001.

VIII. RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Consultants shall report to all three SOT Leaders and their gender representative once every week during a combined meeting, and shall collaborate closely with the mission WID Officer, who works under the supervision of the Democracy and Governance Team Leader.

IX. LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS

- M.S. or Ph.D. in social sciences, with field experience in international development (preferably in West Africa).
- At least one of the Consultants shall have a minimum fluency of French at the FSI 4 level for both speaking and reading.
- The Consultants will have experience in the three SO areas of USAID/Benin.

- Furthermore, the Consultants will have some familiarity with the gender issues in West Africa, as well as networking techniques and constraints in that region.

X. TRAVEL AND PER DIEM

- Air travel to and from Cotonou and the homes of the Consultants.
- In-country travel, as appropriate, for approximately 10 days.
- A total of 28 days per diem in Benin for each Consultant, including four weeks of six-day work-week, and 4 Sundays.
- Up to 4 days per diem for travel.

XI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Consultants will work closely with the mission's WID Officer, who will provide□ oversight while in country, in collaboration with all three SOT Leaders. Entry and exit□ meetings of the Consultants with the mission director or his representative will be organized.□ WIDTECH will provide overall direction as necessary. All TA deliverables will be in□ English and will be provided for comment to USAID/Benin and WIDTECH. □

ANNEX B
PERSONS INTERVIEWED

PERSONS INTERVIEWED

USAID/Benin

Harry Lightfoot, Mission Director
Lynn Keeys, Program Officer
Bernice Noudegbessi, WID Officer
Ruben Johnson, DG Team
Pascal Zizindohoué, DG Team
Georgette Pokou, Education Team
Alicia Dinerstein, Health Team

USAID Projects/Implementing Partners

Education

- National Girls' Education Network, Agnes Ali, Coordinator
- Primary Education NGO Project (PENGOP), World Education, Alan Miller, Director
- Community Participation for Education for All Support Project, CARE International, Amadou Ossing, Project Director
- Primary Education Teacher Training Project (PETT), IFESH, Cynthia Taha, Resident Representative
- Community Action for Girls' Education (CAGE), World Learning, David Houeto, Project Director
- Technical Training for Primary School Leavers and Dropouts, Songhai Center, Frère N'Zamujo, President and Founder
- Catholic Relief Services (PL 480 food aid program), Christopher Bessey, Country Representative; Mourad Aidi, Adjunct Country Representative

Health

- Integrated Promotion of Family Health (PROSAF), University Research Corp., Lauri Winter, Coordinator
- Integrated Malaria Prevention Project (PROLIPO), Africare, Seraphin Vissoh, Health Advisor; Adeline Hodonou, Administrative Manager; Ange Meiza, Head of Community Activities
- GESCOME/CESH, environmental sanitation project, Salifou Yahou, Coordinator
- Project for Institutional Support to the Network of Beninese Health NGOs (ROBS), Blandine Codija-Agassou, ROBS Coordinator and staff

Democracy and Governance

- Vital-Finance, micro-credit project, Wakil Adjibi, Director
- Appropriate Technology International (ATI), Jeff Felten, Representative
- ALCRER, USAID grantee for decentralization workshops, Raoul Glessougbe, Legal Councillor and other staff
- Education for Development and Democracy Initiatives (EDDI), National Council of Negro Women project on women's participation, Juliette Osseni, Eliane de Conceicao, Marcellin Namfon, Casby Quenum, Christiane Quenum, Paul
- Morgan, Francis Ayidehou

Government of Benin

- Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Solidarity (MSPFS), Claire Ayemona, Minister; Sarafatou Inoussa Olodo, Gender Advisor; Calixte Djoussou, Cabinet Attache
- Departmental Directorate of the MSPFS, Atacora, Paul Adjaka, Acting Director; Henriette Yimpe Wani, Gender Specialist
- Departmental Directorate of the MSPFS, Borgou, Marie-Madeleine Mama Sika, Director Of Women's Promotion Service
- Departmental Directorate of the MSPFS, Mono, Rigobert Hounnouvi, Director; Victorine Dato, staff member
- Departmental Directorate of the MSPFS, Ouémé, Pascaline Gblagada, Director; Epiphanie Gbaguidi, Head, Social Protection Service
- Departmental Directorate of the MSPFS, Zou, Félicité Adjagodo, Director; Alex Hougbo, staff member
- Ministry of Public Health, Departmental Directorate for Ouémé, Loukmane Agbo-ola, Director
- Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Service for the Promotion of Girls' Education (SPSF), Sulpice Dossou, Chief of Inspection, Directorate of Primary Education; Philomene Chincoun, Director, SPSF; Denise Grimaud, SPSF
- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Women's Unit for Rural Development, Aichatou Deen, Coordinator

International Donor and Technical Assistance Agencies

- Royal Embassy of Denmark, DANIDA, Ariane Djossou-Segla, Head of Gender and Development Program
- Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), Sabine Akofa Asare-Akomedi, Senior Advisor on Gender and Development
- United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), Henri Cassehounin, Councillor; Edwige Adekambi, Health Programs; Michele Zinsou, Program Officer
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Micheline Boya, Gender Program
- World Health Organization, Regional Institute for Public Health, Khaled Bessaoud, Director

Beninese NGOs and Women's Groups (by Departments)⁵⁰

Atacora/Donga

- GPCV, Barkissou Nassirou, President; Julien Agossou, Marguerite Djotan, Foulera Chabi
- AFVP, Marie Tiando
- AFVP/RIFONGA*, Brigitte Sama, President; Don T. Sama, Pamente Balo
- TIWINTI, Pasteur Martin Sakara
- ABPF, Vincent
- Jeunesse Ambition, Pierre Modeste Lawson
- Development Durable et Environment*, Jean-Paul N'tia N'koue
- Donga Women's Micro-Finance, Nadjo Yaya, Executive Director
- SPF, Ms. Gado

Atlantique/Littoral

- ASFB*, Laurence Monteiro, President
- OFEDI*, Pascaline Assogba, Vice President
- Association Femme et Vie, Jeannette Mahoutin Egbewole, Executive Director;
- Diogo Ernesto, Program Officer
- G/PiFed*, Honorine Attikpa, President
- Association TOSSI, Marie d'Assomption Gnanhoui
- AFACEB, Mathieu Dehoumon
- AADF, Claire Aguessy, Stanislas D'Almeida
- ASFEB, Gansou Reine Alapini
- RECCRETIPAM, Elisabeth Megnigbeto
- RENONGPEF, Marie Noelle Gbedo
- RIFONGA*, Pascaline Ahouilhoua
- WILDAF*, Geneviève Boco Nadjo

Borgou/Alibori

- Kabe Ka Koungou (organization of women traders, Malanville), Zibo Aladji, President; and heads of branches for sellers of different commodities: Adama Boko, Adiza Adamou, Rabi Mama, Aoudou Safiatou, Amadou Adama, Adamou Adiza, Brizzi Boncame, Ramatou Nassar
- Aba Bori (Kandi), Adama Saké, Honorary President; Tairou Moumouni, President; Mr. Kpandi (name incomplete), Executive Director
- APEM*, Oudogni Bio
- CAPID*, Agafari Dagna

⁵⁰ An asterisk following the name of the organization indicates that it has had or currently has a technical, financial or contractual partnership with USAID or its implementing partners.

- ABPF*, Baba Moussa Alassane, President; Mamatou Djossou, Executive Director
- EquiFille*, Yerima Mariam Zime
- GERED, Boni Nicolas Bio, Executive Director; Azaratou Aboumon, Head of Women's Promotion
- Femmes Environnement Action/RAIFB, Memounatou Garba, President
- Ecole Instrument de Paix, Antoinette Agossou, President; Sabine Adeleke
- Yakua Atikua, Abiba Baboni, President; Teneti Maimouna
- Lumiere, Amour et Vie
- Sourou Badou, AwawouAli Yerima Bachabi

Mono/Couffo

- GRAIB, André Zogo, Executive Director
- Foyer de Jeunes Filles de Lokossa, Edith Kougbo, Treasurer

Ouémé/Plateau

- Groupe d'Action pour l'Amour du Bien-Etre Familial GABF-Pobè, Marie Legba, Camille Tente
- ADIL*, Isaac Godonou
- AVPB, Elias Saizonou
- Echos de la Capitale*, Confort Hodonou, Treasurer; Christine Savi
- GERAPIA, Marcellin Odoutoudo
- Groupe d'Action et de Recherches pour le Développement des Initiatives Endogènes Et Novatrices (GARDIEN), Anastasie Hounkpevi, Director
- Troupe Théâtrale Qui Dit Mieux, Grace Dotou
- Union des Femmes Méthodistes du Benin, Marguerite Fassinou, President
- ACFD, Ginette Dossavi
- OFER, Pascaline Ahouangnimon
- Autre Vie, Prudence Lewe
- IBADED, Léonard Baladja, Bernard Acclombessy
- PROFEN, Euphrasie Eyisse

Zou/Collines

- AFPP-Dassa, Jacqueline Agbani, Elisabeth Tossou, Emilie Olodo
- Okoukoutan-Dassa, Marcelline Okoumassou, President
- UAPEES-Dassa*, Pierre Houndji
- UIPAMH, Agathe Todan, President
- ABEFOAD, Marie Assogba, President
- Ligue Life, Antoinette Dadjo, President

ANNEX C
DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

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ANNEX D

DRAFT POINTS FOR A MISSION ORDER ON GENDER

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Purpose

The purpose of this mission order is to establish mission policy on the integration of gender into all relevant mission programs and activities, and to provide guidance for implementing the mission's gender strategy.

Policy

Consistent with Agency policy and provisions on gender analysis and integration contained in Series 200 and 300 of the Automated Directives System (ADS)⁵¹ and other USAID guidance on gender issues, the mission, through this mission order, clarifies and systematizes its policy on gender, and establishes procedures and mechanisms to ensure effective integration of gender issues throughout its programs.

This policy is guided by USAID's conceptual framework for mainstreaming gender, as summarized below:

- Including or addressing gender issues results in more effective and efficient development.
- Gender is not another word for women; rather it means assessing the issues for men, as well as women, as they relate to proposed programs and projects.
- Mainstreaming gender means identifying and analyzing potential gender differences and integrating them throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects.

Terms used in this mission order are defined as follows:

- **Gender** refers to “the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female.”⁵²
- **Gender integration** means “taking account of both the differences and the inequalities between men and women in program planning, implementing, and assessing.”⁵³
- **Gender Analysis** is the “methodology applied to development problems to identify and understand the dimensions and relevance of gender issues and gender-based constraints, and to undertake measures to ensure gender mainstreaming.”⁵⁴ Gender analysis should be included in any other analysis, evaluation or assessment being conducted and should

⁵¹ ADS 200 and 300, Available at the website: www.usaid.gov/pubs/ads.

⁵² DAC Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Co-operation, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, 1998.

⁵³ A Guide to Gender Integration and Analysis: Annex to ADS 200 Series. The paper is currently being drafted and will be available in the future on the website: <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/ads/200/ppcrefindx2.htm>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

include looking at the differences between men's and women's roles, rights, opportunities and constraints.

Gender is a priority area of concern and should be addressed in a cross-cutting manner in all strategic and special objectives encompassed by USAID/Benin programs, and included in all relevant program and activity design, procurement and reporting documents, in accordance with the guidelines in the section on procedures, below. Further, gender issues should be addressed in a coordinated manner to ensure maximum synergy and impact in all program areas. Measures to facilitate coordination are outlined below in the section on coordination.

Integrating gender concerns into the mission's program is the responsibility of all USAID/Benin employees. Neither the mission WID Officer nor the members of the gender committee, referred to in the section on coordination, bear the sole responsibility for ensuring that gender integration takes place. The principal responsibility lies with the SO/SPO teams and with each member of the staff as part of his or her duties.

Procedures

This section outlines the procedures to be followed in integrating attention to gender in program activities and documentation.

Strategic Plans. Gender should be identified as a cross-cutting issue, and reducing gender disparities should be indicated as a strategic priority in all program areas in which gender disparities are likely to adversely affect development results.

All analysis conducted for development of the strategic plan should incorporate gender analysis. Based on such analysis, the strategic plan narrative should specifically note the impact of gender disparities on development in Benin, the implications of gender-related issues for achieving the results outlined in the results framework, and the strategies and illustrative activities planned to address gender-related issues. These should be discussed as an integral part of the narrative for each strategic or special objective, rather than in a separate section on gender.

The results framework should incorporate gender in SO and IR statements when gender is a key variable in achieving the results sought; appropriate gender-disaggregated or gender-sensitive performance indicators should be included.

The WID Officer and committee members may be called on for assistance in drafting the strategic plan, but each SO/SPO team is responsible for gender integration in its respective section of the strategy. Similarly, the program office is responsible for overall gender integration in the strategic plan. The gender committee, with the assistance of the WID Officer, should review the strategic plan prior to finalization, to ensure that gender issues are adequately identified, analyzed and incorporated in the strategy. Any revisions needed should be carried out by the SO/SPO teams and/or program office.

R4s. Gender-differentiated results and progress in eliminating gender disparities should be reported in the R4 in terms of their impact on or contribution to achievement of intermediate results and SOs/SPOs. Measures taken to reduce gender disparities, and the results of those efforts, should be specifically reported, to highlight lessons learned and managing for results. In reporting on results where gender is an important factor, gender-disaggregated and/or gender-sensitive indicators (such as, for example, an indicator which measures parents' attitudes toward educating girls) should be reported in the R4. Significant results shown by such indicators should be discussed in the narrative, together with the probable reasons for any unexpected results. Success stories relevant to both gender and achievement of results should be included whenever possible.

Each SO/SPO team is responsible for including gender-sensitive indicators and narrative in the R4, and the program office has the final responsibility for the document. The gender committee is responsible for reviewing all sections of the R4 and suggesting any needed revisions to the SO/SPO team and/or the program office.

Activity Identification and Design. During activity identification and design processes, it must be determined whether gender is relevant and in what ways, through gender analysis. In simplified form, the following questions should be answered:

- **Who** needs to be reached for action or change to occur? (by sex and other relevant variables).
- **Why, or so what?** What difference would it make if these groups participate or not? What are the implications for achieving objectives?
- **How** can these groups be reached? What are the motivations or important interests of the group? What constraints exist and what are the best means to overcome constraints? What are the best means of communication or outreach?
- **How will we know?** What information is needed to determine who participates and changes that occur as a result?
- **What happened?** Will we know if the expected results are being achieved? If the results are not achieved, can we find out why? Is there sufficient flexibility in the design to allow changes to improve results?

If gender is determined by the SO/SPO or Results Package team not to be a relevant factor, the team must document that decision, and the reasons for it, in accordance with ADS requirements (see sections 303.5.5b and E303.5.5b4).

All activity identification documents should highlight relevant gender issues, the availability of gender-disaggregated information, and needs for additional information. Activity design documents should take these issues into account and set forth and analyze the necessary information to demonstrate the relevance and importance of gender issues to the activity's ability to achieve the desired results. Addressing relevant and important gender issues and disparities must be an integral part of the activity design, and the necessary human skills, material and financial resources, and time needed to address gender issues must be provided for in the design. The design and performance monitoring plan must also include indicators

and benchmarks to monitor progress, taking gender into account. The indicators selected should reflect dimensions important to achievement of the activity's objectives.

The gender committee member(s) from the SO/SPO responsible for the activity should be involved in development of activity designs, assisted as needed by the WID Officer and other members of the gender committee, and/or by external technical assistance. The gender committee should review activity identification and design documents for adequate attention to gender, and indicate any revisions needed, prior to final approval.

Proposal Solicitation and Selection. RFPs, RFAs and similar documents soliciting proposals for the implementation of activities should require attention to gender in all activities for which gender is a relevant factor. If gender has been determined not to be relevant, the document should so state. The areas or aspects of the activity in which gender is relevant should be clearly indicated, and the proposal should be required to specifically show how gender issues will be addressed; how results are determined taking gender into account; and what resources will be provided to do this.

Proposal selection criteria should include the ability to address gender issues, for all proposals for which gender is relevant. The appropriateness of the proposed design, activities, staff and budget should be assessed with regard to gender integration, for both solicited and unsolicited proposals.

Assessments and Evaluations. All sector and activity assessments and evaluations for which gender is a relevant factor should assess the extent to which both sexes participate and benefit, and the degree to which the project design, with or without modifications, contributed to reducing gender disparities and improving the situation of disadvantaged girls/women and/or boys/men. Lessons learned with regard to gender should be highlighted. Scopes of Work for assessments and evaluations should specifically require attention to gender and ensure that gender expertise is included on the assessment/evaluation team, whenever gender is a relevant factor. Ability to address gender issues should be a selection criterion in selecting assessment/evaluation teams.

Coordination

Gender Committee. The existing cross-sectoral synergy committee should be adapted and expanded to oversee the integration of gender into mission programs and activities, as well as to promote synergy. Members should represent all SOs/SPOs and major mission activities, and should have decision-making authority. It is recommended that SO/SPO team leaders serve on the committee. The committee could be chaired by the Program Officer. The WID Officer should be a member of the committee, and could serve as coordinator (or co-coordinator for gender, with another co-coordinator for synergy) for the committee. Membership should be drawn from both US and FSN staff, and both women and men, with as wide and diverse a range of technical and sectoral expertise as possible. Members should be allowed adequate time and the necessary resources to carry out their responsibilities.

The gender/synergy committee should meet quarterly, or as needed to review program and activity documentation.

The role of this committee is to oversee implementation of the mission's gender strategy, and the provisions outlined in this mission order, across the entire USAID/Benin program, as well as to promote synergies throughout all areas of the program, including synergies with regard to gender.

Specific functions of the committee (with regard to gender) include:

- Reviewing strategic plans, results frameworks and R4s (including indicators) for attention to gender, and recommending needed revisions. The revisions suggested by the committee shall be made by the respective SO/SPO team, unless convincing reasons are set forth for not making such changes. The mission should decide (in advance) who will make the final determination, in cases of difference of opinion.
- Reviewing activity identification and design documents for attention to gender, under the same conditions as above.
- Reviewing proposal solicitation documents and proposals for attention to gender.
- Reviewing Scopes of Work for assessments and evaluations, as well as drafts of completed assessments and evaluations, for attention to gender.
- Serving as a resource to assist SO/SPO teams in conceptualizing gender issues and drafting the above documents.
- Ensuring that gender-related interventions across activities and/or sectors are coordinated, and that as much synergy as possible is achieved in order to maximize impact.
- Visiting major gender-related field activities periodically to monitor progress, including activities outside Cotonou.